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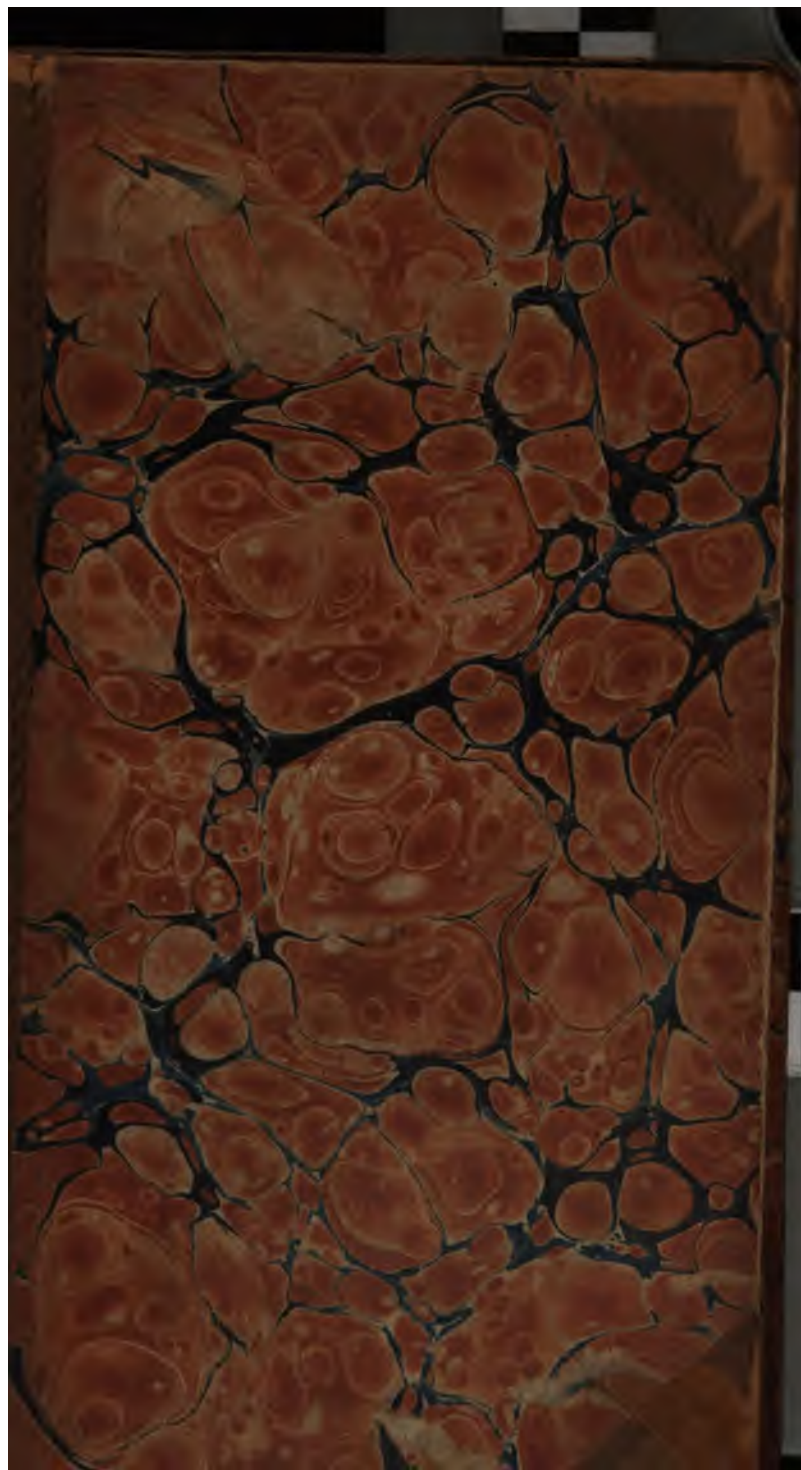
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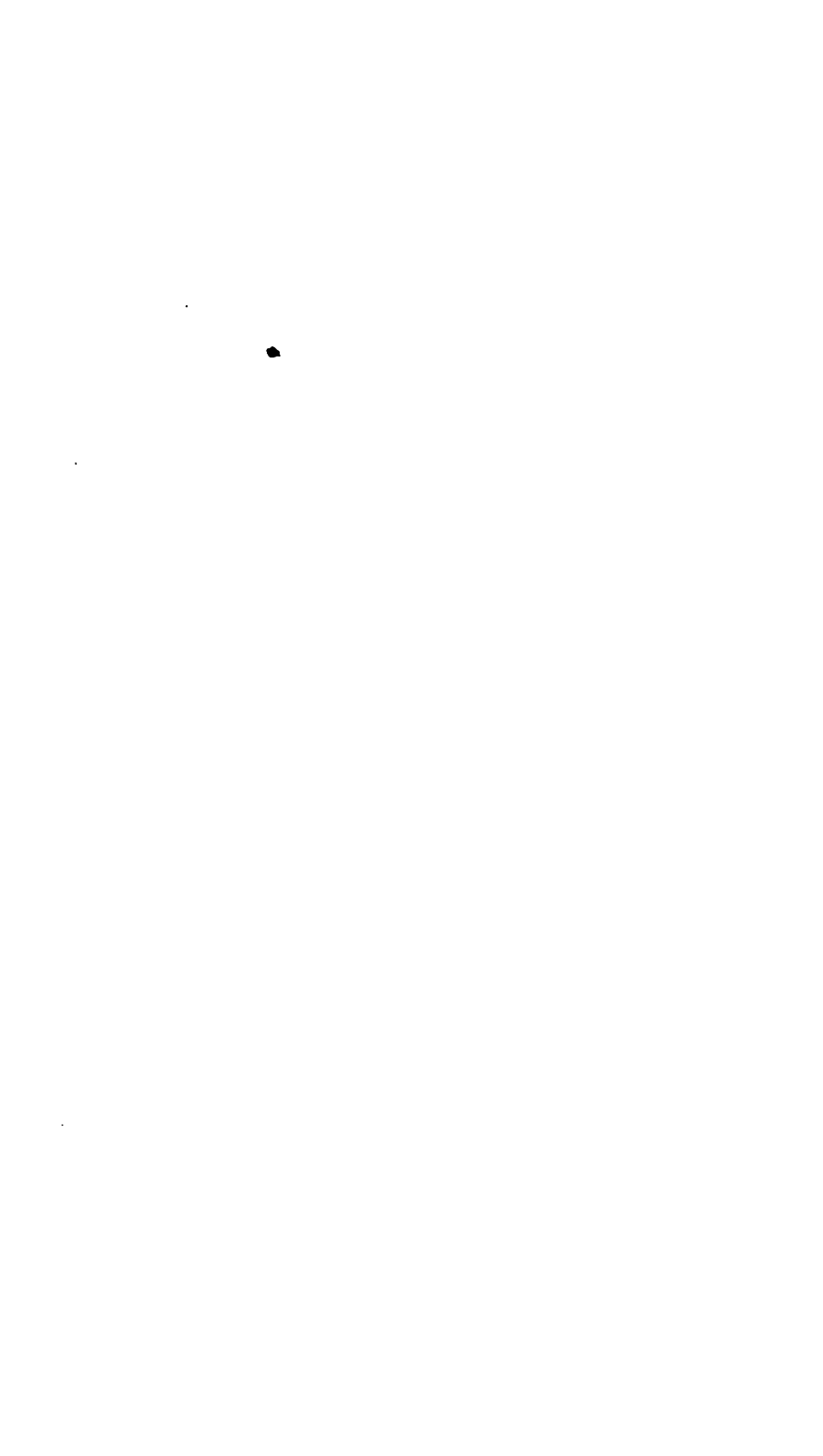
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THE
LETTRE DE CACHET.

Who'll believe
A mother could do this? but let it pass :
Anger suits not the grave. Oh! my own love,
Too late I see thy gentle constancy.

CORNWALL.





LONDON:
Printed by W. CLOWES,
Stamford-street.



P R E F A C E .

I AM told that there is a general prejudice against a *single volume*. If so, it must exist in the bookselling, not in the book-reading world : for which of us has not been stunned with complaints of the diffuseness of modern novelists ? a charge from which the magician of the North has barely escaped. I am persuaded that no fictitious interest, no variety of incident, can be laboured to fill the honorable complement of twelve hundred hot-pressed pages, without the intervention of

What squires call potter, and what men call prose.

But since the advocates of three respectable

octavo volumes may deny my right of assertion, let me defend my cause by an exposition of facts.

What work of fiction has ever obtained a more flattering popularity than *The Vicar of Wakefield*? Which was the English novel included in each of the ten Carlton-house lists of amusing works? *Roderick Random*! How stood *Rasselas* in the public opinion on its first appearance? Which of Mrs. Opie's more lengthy performances is ever named in competition with *The Father and Daughter*? or where has Miss Edgeworth surpassed her admirable *Castle Rackrent*? Were not *The Man of Feeling*, and *Julia de Roubigné*, the Scotch novels of our youth;—and has not *Adam Blair* been elevated more recently to the same level?

Of *Matilda* I shall say nothing; for I perceive that its author has, in his second edi-

tion, unworthily deserted the cause of solitary blessedness; but I will rather turn to the annals of modern French literature, and inquire what novels have been greater favourites than *Elizabeth*—*La Dot de Suzette*—*Ourika*—*Adolphe*—*Le Solitaire*, and *Paul et Virginie*?

I find that my “modern instances” are too numerous for the preface of so despised an interloper in the literary world as a single volume! Let me, therefore, learn to endure its contumely with due humility—and be silent.



THE

ERRATA.

Page	6,	line	10,	<i>for</i>	<i>lestet</i> ,	<i>read</i>	<i>leste et.</i>	
55,		14,		}	<i>for</i>	<i>Ghetto degli Ebrai</i> ,	<i>read</i>	<i>Ghetta degli Ebrei.</i>
59,		13,						
162,		16,			<i>for</i>	<i>sacrifices</i> ,	<i>read</i>	<i>sacrifices.</i>
171,		4,			<i>for</i>	<i>Gérily</i> ,	<i>read</i>	<i>Gérilly.</i>
197,		12,			<i>for</i>	<i>camorade</i> ,	<i>read</i>	<i>camarade.</i>
230,		17,			<i>for</i>	<i>perceived</i> ,	<i>read</i>	<i>perceived.</i>
238,		22,			<i>for</i>	<i>form</i> ,	<i>read</i>	<i>from.</i>
261,		11,			<i>for</i>	<i>conteau</i> ,	<i>read</i>	<i>couteau.</i>
262,		7,			<i>for</i>	<i>Sneyders</i> ,	<i>read</i>	<i>Snyders.</i>
310,		21,			<i>for</i>	<i>bein</i> ,	<i>read</i>	<i>bien.</i>
312,		18,			<i>for</i>	<i>méritent</i> ,	<i>read</i>	<i>méritent.</i>
313,		6,			<i>for</i>	<i>jaimais</i> ,	<i>read</i>	<i>jamais.</i>

yourite palace of Marly, in the autumn of the year 17—, that he first proposed to the Duc de L—, in terms which, to an experienced courtier of those days, held the importance of commands, the marriage of his only son with the heiress of the ancient family of Roche-Guyon.

Although every advantage was included in such a connexion, which could gratify the pride, or

satisfy the avarice of an illustrious house ; although it afforded every promise which could be exacted by paternal affection, or by the *exigence* of a *chef de famille* ; still there was a mixture of inquietude,—a slight shadow of anxiety in the respectful obeisance with which the proposition was received. “It is time,” added the king, with an air of graceful condescension which increased, if possible, the dignified hauteur of his usual demeanour, “It is time that the Marquis de L—— should no longer remain a stranger to the pleasures of the court. I wish to begin his season of favour as early as the affection I have ever borne towards his family will entitle him to expect. We have yet some days unexpired of our stay at Marly ;—your lordship will have the kindness to express our wish, that he should assist at the remaining fêtes which will enliven our sojourn.”

Eminently gifted to adorn the high station to which he was now, for the first time, publicly summoned, the young Gustave de L—— ex-

changed with delight the dulness of the paternal chateau, where, under the guidance of the Abbé de Fresnoy, he had worn away his weary hours between the pedantic and heavily-inflicted lessons of his preceptor, and the enjoyment of such field-sports as might become one of gentle blood—(and even these were tinctured with the formalities which pervaded every branch of a noble establishment)—for the enjoyments of the most brilliant court that had yet unfolded its magnificence on the banks of the Seine.

It may be doubted, whether a young noble of the present day would hail such an introduction with pleasure, or submit to it with discontent. The severe laws of etiquette then existing, the slightest infraction of which was sufficient to call down on its perpetrator the full weight of royal displeasure, and the inevitable accompaniment of fashionable ignominy;—the cold formalities which then invaded even the domestic privacies of courtier life;—the base renunciation of personal freedom and enjoyment,

exacted from every member of a royal train;—the perpetual state of *représentation* which excluded the indulgence of every natural feeling and frailty;—all these are restraints, which, to an independent mind, and a body untamed to relinquish the common impulses of humanity, are sufficiently irksome to counterbalance even the glories of a *Cordon*, and the overpowering influence of a royal smile. But in those days, when the children of the nobility, and of those destined to “dwell in the purlieus of the courts of kings,” were trained from their cradles in the observance of every stricter form of social ceremony;—when they were nursed in lappets, and tottered in a hoop instead of a go-cart, as the existing portraits of high and puissant infant princes, in wide-skirted coats, and all the happily-exploded finery of a court toilet, still attest;—when they saw their parents estimate an apartment at Versailles, however paltry and inconvenient, far above those of their own roomy and magnificent hotels; and heard the deeds—the graces—the courtesies of

the *Grand Monarque* made an hourly theme of wonder and of admiration, it is not remarkable that a presentation at court, under favourable auspices, should have been considered by a young aspirant, as inferior only to an introduction within the gates guarded by St. Peter himself. Even Gustave de L——, whose mind had suffered less degradation from the debasing habits and chilling influences of early education than most of those of his age and class, felt no trifling flutter of spirit as he rolled into the vast courtyard; his six “dappled Flanders mares,” sinking under the weight of gorgeous housings, and dragging a vehicle, which rather resembled a capacious family dwelling-house, than those we devote to a similar service in the present day.

Where is now the father, who, on the approach of an only and beloved son, would stand unmoved at the end of a long suite of apartments, till the appointed number of folding doors had been opened and shut by the appointed number of laquais, and valets de chambre? Or where is

now the son, who would consider himself honoured by being permitted to salute a well-ruffled hand, coldly extended towards his lips by his own father?

But Gustave saw only in this reception the common politeness of civilised life. He knew himself blessed far beyond any young man of his own acquaintance, in the affection and consideration of his father; and although himself

Beau—brillant—lestet volage—

Aimable et franc, comme on l'est au bel age,

he could reconcile the most formal and respectful observance of the forms of society, with the warmest glow of filial tenderness.

The débût of the young Marquis de L. was eminently successful. At the *coucher* of the king, the *bougeoir*, glorious distinction! was vouchsafed to his hand. The Princesse de Conti, the lovely daughter of La Vallière, and at that moment the reigning beauty of Versailles, had pronounced him to be “ *d'une tournure des plus dis-*

tinguées," and the Duc de Lauzun had requested the address of his embroiderer ! What marvel then that the general voice should congratulate the father of so promising a son ; or that the fame of the embryo gallant of the Court should penetrate even the *parloir* where Mademoiselle de la Roche-Guyon awaited his formal presentation !

But it was rumoured, in that favorite nest of Rumour, the palace of Versailles, with its immeasurable corridors, and their pigeon-hole *logements*, that the Duc de L. had required a delay in negotiating the marriage in question ; and it was even whispered that the statesman had exhibited an indifference on the subject of the alliance altogether, sufficiently irritating to the lofty line of Roche-Guyon, which boasted of Princes, Cardinals, and Field-Marsals, enough to puzzle the numeration table.

In the mean time Gustave's education was not neglected. He was instructed how many paces to advance as the great Louis passed through the

gallery to mass ;—how many seconds to employ in drawing off his glove, should a Prince of the blood, by awkwardly dropping his own, require his aid in its restoration ;—how many inches to depress his shoulders should one of the “ children of France ” honour him by his Royal notice ;—and how many inches lower, should he be equally favored by one of the children of the king ; for the offspring of Madame de Montespan were generally believed to hold a much dearer place in the affections of his Majesty, than either the Dauphin or his brother. He was taught

To whom to bow—whom take into his coach ;

in short, the frank, the honest-hearted Gustave, ran no trifling risk of becoming a mere pitiful, cringing, formal, well-bred Marquis de L., full of idle pretensions and narrow designs. But a pause soon occurred in the practice of his newly-acquired accomplishments.

The Duc de L. had requested an audience, in order to demand the outrageous freedom of seven days’ release from his duties ; and, on pretence of

urgent personal business at the Château de L——, he was graciously permitted to visit his domain, for the first time during several years. The Duc de L—— had never, it is true, evinced any particular predilection for the habitation of his ancestors. The Château de L—— was connected in his mind with the memory of his wife, a frail and unfortunate woman,—whose affections, unfettered by a mere marriage of *convenance*, had been fixed on other objects than her husband and son; and whose early death had alone rescued her from public infamy.

Gustave contemplated, with fresh emotion, a first domestication with his father. Graceful, but possessed of a dignity of deportment almost amounting to coldness, the countenance of the Duc de L—— had suffered so severe a schooling in the service of royalty, that it was difficult to decypher the real nature of his disposition through any external show of feeling. His conduct alone had stamped upon his character the reputation of a high-minded and honest man; of one incapable

of abusing the high trust reposed in him by his Sovereign. But further, penetration reached, and fame spoke not. Whether a sensibility wounded by his domestic sorrows, or whether native indifference had framed the calm apathy of his demeanour,—none guessed, and least of all that son, to whom he was better known in his official character, than in the seclusion of private life. He might be generous and warm-hearted;—he might be liberal in his opinions, and tender in his affections, as he was stately and reserved; but Gustave possessed at present no key to the cypher. He was to him, as to others, the upright minister,—the stern Duc de L——; he had never yet proved himself the father and the friend.

On the evening of their arrival at L——, the duke and his son were invited to contemplate the loveliness of a summer sunset, from one of the lofty terraces overhanging the river Loire, which formed a principal ornament of its far-famed gardens. As they paced slowly along, the broad

gravel—long, shadowless, and unmeaning,—returned no tribute of beauty or fragrance, to the bright rays that lay revelling on its bosom. In that stately garden, no wilderness of flowers, no entanglement of luxuriant verdure, invited the wandering step to find refuge from noonday sultriness; no clustering blossoms required the aid of female taste to prop and direct their graceful growth;—no carol of birds broke at day-dawn from the bushes;—but all was artificial, heartless, and magnificent. The flowers themselves, which adorned the parterres, were of a gaudy and untasteful selection. The tall hollyhock, in its rich variety of ranks and colours; asters and daisies of every dye;—the myrtle, clipped and formal, ranged in marble vases along the parapet of the terrace, and mingled at intervals with pomegranate and orange trees, similarly robbed of their natural beauty. The very jessamine, that “chartered libertine,” ceased to be a vagrant there; and closely nailed over the trellice of a *bosquet*, no longer drooped its silver stars within

reach of the hand. There was a brook too, which nature had here destined to pour its waters into the Loire, from a gravelly bed, where the spotted trout might have darted along the shallows, shaded by a natural fringe of maple and hazel. But it had been directed from its channel by the perplexing hand of art, to water the dusty fountains, where "gaping Tritons," and a thousand venomous reptiles spouted forth their rage against the shrinking form of Latona protecting her twins, and partly into marble tanks, where the carp basked glittering in the sun, and appeared to pant for a more congenial element.

Such were the ornaments of the garden where the Duc de L—— and his son stood contemplating the setting of a summer sun, over a landscape richly clothed with forest wood, and already partially enlivened by the vintage feast. "This beautiful spectacle," said the Duke mournfully, "is somewhat new to me. Were it not too late to debate upon the eligibility of the life I have chosen unto myself, I might be led to in-

quire whether the mighty Giver of such gifts will forgive their cold and hasty resignation for the artificial atmosphere of a court. I feel, at this moment, as though I had ungraciously rejected the offering of a friend! Gustave—I have lived too long for the world;—the lamp of life is already on the wane; and the unprofitable pursuits for which it hath been consumed have left little behind but vexation and regret. Yes, my son! the silence with which you listen to my words, the coldness with which you contemplate, for the first time, the emotions of your father, fatally evince that I have omitted to cultivate the affections of my child; even as the beauties of the creation reproach me in the simplicity of their loveliness, that I have hitherto neglected their enjoyment. It is fitting that both should be withdrawn from me."

The tears that arose in the eyes of the minister, as he uttered these words, were already more than answered in those of his son; but startled and even awed by so unlooked for a display of

agitation and bitter reflection on the part of his father, he replied only by respectfully taking his hand, and pressing it to his lips. After a few moments of mutual silence, the duke resumed, in the altered and deep tone of voice which fitted the intense and conflicting emotions of his heart :—
“Gustave—it was for no idle purpose—no solicitude for worldly advantage, that I declined an immediate termination of our treaty with the family of Roche-Guyon, and withdrew from the importunate solicitations of Versailles to this scene of tranquillity. It is requisite that you should at length know, and be known to your surviving parent. My beloved child—let us no longer be strangers to each other !”

Deeply impressed, the young man followed in silence the hurried and agitated steps of the Duc de L——, to the full extent of the terrace; then leaning heavily on the marble balustrade of a flight of massive steps which led to the saloon, the Duke resumed his stately pace, as he passed through a file of liveried attendants in the ante-

chamber. For a moment, the warm current of his feelings appeared to freeze again—he resumed his former sternness ; but when the servants whom he had hastily summoned to supply the coffee-service, withdrew, he commanded that no one should presume to interrupt him for the rest of the evening ; and motioning to Gustave to follow him, he led the way to a boudoir which terminated the suite of apartments they inhabited. It was a small octagon room, richly hung with blue damask, and enriched with gilded cornices and window frames. A canopy of similar materials, and two massive buhl cabinets, completed its furniture ; and its general appearance denoted that it had been a favorite resort of female taste.

“ This was my late mother’s chosen apartment,” said the Duke, hastily throwing himself upon the couch, and desiring his son to place himself at his side ; “ what think you of the taste of its decorations ?”

Gustave, concluding that his father wished to withdraw his personal observation from himself,

by this inquiry, began carelessly to admire some of the thousand costly trinkets scattered on the cabinets ; and to examine the festoons of exquisite carving which decorated the pannels. “ It is indeed,” he replied, “ a fairy palace—a nest of elegance and luxury.” “ It is a cavern of damnation !” said the duke, in a hollow, agonized voice. “ Gustave—it was on this very spot that the heart of thy father received the deepest wound which could afflict humanity,—*here*, the curse fell upon me ! Yea ! *here* have I suffered the torments of the condemned,—and even here will I derive my first consolation, by unfolding the mystery of my early life to the commiseration of my child.”

“ Not now—not at this agitating moment, my lord !—spare us both, my beloved father.”

“ Gustave, it is at this hour only, that the knowledge of your father’s destiny may in aught avail you, and prevent you from rashly undertaking the fulfilment of duties, upon whose good or evil consummation depends the happiness or

the utter desolation of your future existence. Had I been so exhorted—so tenderly forewarned, what hours of bitter and unmitigated torture had I been spared ! But I will no longer keep you in suspense,” added he, rising, and taking a large packet of writings from one of the cabinets. “Read these, my dear son, and judge as leniently as you may, the feelings of a father who has himself so bitterly expiated the errors of his youth.”

So saying, and placing in the hands of Gustave the important writings to which he alluded, the Duc de L—— slowly withdrew from the apartment.

CHAPTER II.

“ Room—room within,
For the boy Lordling, and his parasites !
Vice, with her scorpion shadow—dire Remorse,—
Folly, with flaunting plumes and jingling bauble—
Waste, with outstretching hands—and lewd Excess,—
See how they follow, like a rabble-rout,
Cheering him on to ruin.”—*The Prodigal*.

The Manuscript.

“ To you, my son, it were needless to enlarge upon the noble descent of our house. From your cradle even until now, the babbling of domestics, the blazonries of the herald, and even the archives of your native land, have not failed to impress upon your mind the splendour of the line to which you belong. Sufficiently conscious of this advantage, my father, the late Duc de L——, had selected his wife in a family equally illustrious ; and my mother, in adding to our escutcheon the bearings of the house of Monthémar,

had also contributed to our household gifts, its pride—and its poverty. In depicting her character, let me not be guilty of unnatural harshness;—yet deeply as the failings of her nature have been visited upon me and mine, I may not—I cannot consider them with the lenient submission of a son. The small measure of personal care and affection bestowed upon my childhood, when that mother was diverted from the completion of every domestic duty by the vanities of successful beauty, as well as by the anxieties of the most insatiate ambition, convinces me that to her maternal tenderness alone, I am little indebted for the importance I afterwards assumed in her eyes. I can remember no instance in which one genuine caress of motherly love, one spontaneous effusion of womanly tenderness, was ever lavished on me by the Duchesse de L——. A transient notice of my growth, or a censure of my personal appearance, as she passed through my chamber, on her way to the brilliant saloon, where a thousand admirers waited her arrival, was her sole

acknowledgment of my existence. I had one sister, who shared, or more than shared with me, the indifference of my mother ; and we grew together like weeds in the desolation of a neglected garden. While still a child, I was informed that she was destined for a cloister ; and the idea of being parted from Adelaïde taught me the first sensation of sorrow. She was the companion of my sports, the gentle assistant of my earliest studies. When threatened by my attendants with the displeasure of my mother, whose image was always associated in my mind with the idea of privation and punishment, Adelaïde was my consoling angel. But all this was soon to end ; and before she had attained even the second stage of childhood, she was removed, to complete her education, in the convent where, from her birth, she had been destined hereafter to take the veil.

To mitigate the pain occasioned by this separation, the rudiments of the disgusting art of expediency, to which I have since learned to sacrifice so deeply, were then first unfolded to my

comprehension. I was, for the first time, given to understand that to the awful pre-eminence of rank, attached to the house of L——, was linked the degradation of pecuniary embarrassments. Too indolent, too arrogant to improve the resources of his impoverished revenues by personal exertion, or even by personal privation, my father continued to enjoy the luxurious and wanton waste of magnificence which pervaded every branch of his establishment; while increased expenditure, and decreased means—decreased by a long succession of inactive and prodigal ancestors, as well as by the haughty recklessness of a profuse wife, threatened to subject his age to penury and deprivation. By sacrificing his only daughter to a life of religious seclusion, he was enabled to evade her claim to a maintenance and dowry suitable to her name; and by condemning his only remaining child to an ill-assorted union, for the purpose of attaching to his own the splendid domains of the Maréchal de Viry, he trusted to escape the necessity for personal sacri-

fices by which he was menaced. From an early age I was taught to consider my future destiny as already assigned. The hopes—the doubts—the fears of affection were denied me ; and my path of life, long, wearisome, and fully developed, lay before me. It was formally announced to me, that as soon as our respective ages permitted, I was to be united to Mademoiselle de Viry ; and that in the mean time, my partial and ill-directed education was to be completed by a tour through the principal countries of Europe, under the tuition of a former secretary of my father, a Monsieur de Tervines.

No proposition could have been more acceptable to my feelings. Of all the various projects thus unfolded to my imagination, Mademoiselle de Viry, and my intended marriage, appeared the least important. I had been already initiated into the dulness and ennui of my father's stately train of idle parasites ; I had been already wearied by the monotonous *bon-ton*, and empty assumptions of my mother's chosen *côterie*. The tedious inanity

of court whispers—the mortification of disappointed solicitation—the mean avidity—the solemn emptiness of the great, had already disgusted me with the domestic habits of our house; and the troublesome consideration, which already began to attach itself to the only son of the Duc de L——, taught me to abhor the irksome and heartless watchfulness with which I was now beset by my mother. As the heir of her name, as the restorer of the fallen fortunes and tottering greatness of her house, I soon learned my claims to her attention;—as her son—as the offspring of her bosom, how little had they availed me!

In order to receive my homage in presence of our united families, Mademoiselle de Viry was withdrawn from her convent,—the same in which my unfortunate sister was sentenced to waste away the beauty and joy of her youth;—and immediately after this short and formal interview, I departed from Paris. I remarked nothing in my intended bride, except that her appearance was mean, her address awkward, and her counte-

nance cold and contracted. But I grieved not over her want of personal charms. The prospect of our union was remote—remote at least to the unpractised eye of youth. Three years were previously to elapse—three joyous and varying years of endless diversion, and what visionary projects already floated before my imagination! Of all the studies, to which, by choice or necessity, I had addressed myself, the art of painting, then little practised in France by amateurs, was the only one to which I had accorded a preference. The prospect of visiting Italy had ever been my favourite day-dream; and now, the approaching realization of my hopes filled me with delight. Venice—Florence—Rome—Naples—with their train of voluptuous enjoyments;—the classic temples of art—the festivals of the great—all that could charm the ear—the eye—the touch,—appeared awaiting my selection.

From the discipline of my governor, the excesses of whose conduct at Paris had been ill concealed from my observation, I knew I had

little to dread. In Monsieur de Tervines, I expected to find, and I afterwards found, an elegant and easy companion; too well bred to intrude on my amusements, and too selfish to forego his own. From the first, there existed an excellent understanding between us. His letters to my father, which were but of rare occurrence, teemed with encomiums of my prudence, of the propriety of my general demeanour, and of my success at the various courts to which we had presented letters of introduction. While mine, which were still more rare, carefully extolled the gentlemanly address and steady *surveillance* of my preceptor and friend, Monsieur de Tervines. It was true indeed, that he assiduously attended me to the Tennis Court, and shared in my lessons of equitation, and of the Italian language; but the greater part of my time was left absolutely to my own disposal; and at the age of twenty, in the full excitation of every passion, and in the total absence of each better monitor, it is not wonderful that my career was marked

by excesses, such as I will not degrade myself by unfolding to the knowledge of my son.

It was nearly seven months after my departure from Paris, that we agreed, contrary to the express directions of my father, to pass the season of the carnival at Venice. That romantic city, at all times a very palace of the senses,—boasted, at the period to which I allude, of a society of young nobles, probably the most dissolute in Europe. I had become accidentally acquainted at Milan, with one of its most distinguished members, the Prince Caratelli. Like myself, the only son of an illustrious family,—like myself, of a turbulent and ungovernable spirit,—like myself, left to pursue the dictates of an ill-regulated mind,—he became my chosen companion; initiating me into the looser pleasures of a licentious career; pointing, by his bolder and more confident frame of mind, to excesses, from which at first I shrank with dismay; and lending a charm, through the elegance of his personal appearance, and the graces of an accomplished

figure, to deeds which had otherwise revolted me by their native repulsiveness. It would be difficult to conceive a more highly-gifted being than Caratelli, considering him as a mere creature fashioned by the Almighty Maker of the universe; and surely it is in itself no small measure of sin, to pollute the image of God as it was hourly polluted by him; and to degrade the attributes of Omnipotence with every abasement that humanity can compass.

We accompanied Caratelli to Venice; and under his auspices were initiated into the first class of society in that illustrious city, as well as into the orgies by which he delighted to level himself with the lowest it afforded. Wine—women—dice,—companionship with the sharper, the harlot, and the drunken reveller—such were our pastimes—such the desperate resources of our desperate hearts. We had exhausted every guiltless means of diversion; till, wearied to satiety by gratified and lawless indulgence, we

drained every fountain of pleasure till its dregs were bitterness to the taste.

It was during the last days of the carnival, that on sallying forth from a scene of Bacchanalian riot, where we had passed the night, a quarrel, respecting a worthless woman, arose among the inebriated group of which I formed a part. Rash words—rash and intemperate words—passed amongst us; and in the flush of wine, swords were drawn, and blows exchanged, even before the cause of the dispute was exactly known. Monsieur de Tervines and a young Neapolitan officer were on my side—on the other, alas! were Caratelli, and three of his chosen associates. After a personal encounter with one of the three, whom I disarmed, I turned, on an exclamation of my companion, and perceived that three of our antagonists had disappeared; one only, and that one Caratelli, was lying bleeding on the ground. A cold chill struck to my heart; I felt an instant presentiment

that he was mortally wounded. He was not insensible,—but as we raised him from the ground, his ghastly countenance, exhibited by the dull grey twilight of a spring dawn, afforded justifiable cause of alarm. We removed him into the porch of a neighbouring monastery of Dominicans, who afforded him every relief that kindness or skill could suggest. The sword, which was that of Monsieur de Tervines, had broken in his side by the violence of his fall; and before the fragment could be extracted, an operation attended with some danger, it was judged necessary to acquaint his family with his situation.

They came—the haughty patrician father—now moved by the danger of his first-born to the weakness and gentleness of a child—the stern mother—now pale, tearless, and speechless, sorrowing together in their hopeless agony over the prodigal, but still beloved! As they bent over the pallet on which, for the sake of immediate relief, Caratelli had been deposited, the glittering splen-

dour of his masquerade habit, displaying in its partial removal the muscular vigour of his person, formed a striking contrast with the grey garbs and sallow and passionless countenances of the emaciated brotherhood who were ministering to his relief. His mother knelt by his side, with his unnerved and relaxing hand clasped in her own; and the long white robe, in which, amid the dread stillness of the night she had been hurried from her home, was soiled and dabbled in blood—the life blood of her only son.

De Tervines was leaning against the wall of the dormitory, in breathless anxiety; and scarcely conscious of a wound, at any other moment, sufficiently painful. Such, Gustave—such was the scene of misery to which the path of habitual vice had conducted your father!

The closing hour of Caratelli's life was worthy of a far nobler commencement. Naturally of a noble and generous disposition, his spirit, about to put on immortality, appeared to shake off the corruption by which it had been obscured, and to

exhibit only the better impulses of its nature. His dying request to his parents was, that they should neither directly nor indirectly seek to avenge his death. He stretched out his hands to De Tervines and myself; and frankly acknowledged that he had fully provoked his fate by his own violence of temper. Then, faintly smiling, he counselled me to withdraw immediately from Venice, lest the law, and either his personal friends, or my own personal enemies, should profit by my mischance, to interfere with his good wishes for my welfare. "For you, De Tervines," added he, "I have, if I mistake not, placed an unfortunate obstacle to your flight,—look well to your guard arm, for the blow of Caratelli hath long been esteemed a sure one. But, till your wound is healed, promise me to unite penitence and security, by remaining under sanctuary in this monastery.—My life on it you will not be in case to rejoin your pupil till you have assisted at a hundred masses for the repose of my soul." I shuddered at this

last flight of levity ; for, as he spoke, his voice grew fainter, and his words became perplexed in the approach of death ; and in a few moments, before any material assistance had been rendered him, one long piercing shriek from his kneeling mother, apprized us that the spirit had passed away. I looked, and saw the fixed and uninformed features—the still lips, whence the breath of life had departed—and I knew that Caratelli was indeed no more !

In a few hours, clad in the dress of my own servant, who by mutual arrangement was to remain with my suffering friend De Tervines, mounted on a fleet horse, and carrying with me a sufficient sum in gold, I was out of the Venetian territories, and on my road towards Rome. Gracious God ! by what a torrent of overwhelming emotion was my heart oppressed on my first pause from the necessary speed of my course ! The events of the preceding day and night had succeeded each other with such bewildering rapidity,

that, but an apparent moment past, and Caratelli was wassailing by my side in the intemperate recklessness of youth and joy;—his clear and manly voice seemed yet ringing in my ears—his friendly pressure seemed still resting on my shoulder—but now, the damps of death were on that haughty brow,—and I, his hand-in-hand companion, was fleeing, a midnight fugitive, before the avengers of his murder! I passed by necessity one fevered night of agitation and remorse, at a miserable inn on the road;—and there, in my solitary vigils, I could not drive the wild laugh of Caratelli from my ears; nor from my touch, the dying grasp of his cold damp hand. Oh God! what awful reflections—what humiliating, what overcoming recriminations obscured my troubled faculties during that dreadful night!

It was necessary, however, for my security that I should now adopt decisive measures for my further safety; not only on my own account, but to prevent the knowledge of my errors and those of

my preceptor, from reaching my family. I determined therefore on a temporary change of name and station, till the restoration of De Tervines should enable him to rejoin me. I sold my horse to the *Aubergiste*; and on foot, and in the guise of a nameless and obscure traveller, I entered Rome.

CHAPTER III.

“Rome, depuis long temps, est l’asile des exilés de la terre.”—DE STAEL.

“OF all who ever passed the mighty gates of the ‘Eternal City,’ no one had surely ever contemplated its approach with an utter indifference like mine. Its glories—its greatness, past or present—its treasures of art—its influence over the fate of nations—what were these but vanity to me! The energies of my mind seemed gathered up within the winding-sheet of my friend—the pulses of my heart seemed withered by the blow that had laid him with the dead.—Even now, I had contemplated the passing of a soul from mortality to immortality!—Eternity had been half unveiled before my eyes;—and as I turned from so awful a spectacle, how vain—how mean—how

impotent appeared the pride of a ruined forum—the splendour of a gorgeous and sovereign altar !

My first measure on my arrival was to possess myself of an obscure lodging in one of the less-frequented parts of the city ; and there, under the assumed name of Lavisier, I passed for a young French artist, sojourning at Rome for the purpose of improvement in my profession. Harassed and disgusted by the inquisitive familiarity to which I was exposed by the meanness of the rank of society to which I had announced myself as belonging,—familiarity equally novel and irritating to one accustomed from his birth to the deference and regard of the vulgar, I was frequently driven, however reluctantly, from the pitiful habitation where I had chosen my retreat ; and instead of abandoning myself to that silence and solitude which would have been most congenial to my existing frame of mind, I fled from the loneliness of my apartment to the still lonelier refuge of a crowd ; and there, unknowing and unknown, I mingled with a mass of indi-

viduals, alike unconscious and careless of my existence. Hour after hour, day after day, I paraded the public ways of Rome ; attracting in my simple garb no notice which might thereafter entail the shame of recognition upon the heir of the house of L——. My mind was indeed deeply shaken by the afflicting scenes to which I had been recently a witness ; yet had I but possessed a single friend—could I have addressed myself to any human being for consolation in my sorrow, or exhortation in my bewilderment,—and more than all, had I been blest with a fitting consciousness of Divine power and mercy, I had not fallen into so utter a self-abandonment.

Indifferent, however, as I had become to all external shows, I felt myself impelled, by total incapability of employment, to visit the principal objects of interest in the city. The churches—the palaces—and galleries of modern Rome ;—the desolated temples—the ruined walls of the ancient city, passed before my eyes like the empty pageant of a dream. Cold and unexcited, self-

weary and self-condemned—my soul, chilled even unto apathy in its loneliness, returned no echo to the voice of these mighty monuments of past ages. Their beauty touched not my heart; their desolation roused not my regret. There was a sound of lamentation still ringing in my ears, which overpowered all other complaining—even the voice of a childless mother sorrowing over her bereavement. At length, unable longer to endure the lassitude of mind which made my season of expectation and seclusion appear unending, I determined to profit by my assumed character, and place myself under the tuition of some artist of eminence, in order to perfect myself in the art of figure-painting. I visited accordingly every *studio* of note; and finally entered myself as a pupil, under an historical painter commonly known in Rome by the name of Geriglio. He was a Frenchman by birth; but having passed into Italy, early in life, under the patronage of the Cardinal de Richelieu, in order to complete his professional education, he had married, and

obtained a naturalization in Rome, in preference to returning to his native country.

His school of art had obtained a reputation little inferior to that of the greatest masters, his predecessors and cotemporaries; and no gallery was considered complete, till ornamented by a picture of Geriglio. But his caprice in the sale and distribution of his works was one great source of their popularity. He had been frequently known to refuse one of his inferior performances, even at the highest price, to some Monsignore, or noble collector, who had obtained the reputation of illiberality among the necessitous members of the profession; while, to a generous patron of the arts, he would offer the finest of his pieces at a very low price.

From the associations to which my name and language probably gave rise, I speedily became a distinguished favourite with my new master. With the enthusiasm and originality of a highly gifted mind, De Gérilly combined an elegance of address not usually met with in his class of so-

ciety; and in defiance of my natural haughtiness of heart, I felt proud of being, for the first time, distinguished above my fellows, by an enlightened man, whose discrimination had not been prejudiced by his knowledge of my birth and fortune. Three days in the week I diligently attended the academy of De Gérilly; the three intervening days I knew him to be exclusively occupied in decorating the great staircase of the Villa Ludovisi,—a work, to the accomplishment of which he looked as his best passport to posterity; and to which he attached so much importance, that he admitted the assistance of only two of his most distinguished scholars, Barbarino and Andrea.

Such was his influence with the Prince Piombino, to whose patronage he was indebted for an employment so satisfactory to his ambition, that he had obtained an order for the exclusion of all strangers from the Villa, till his work should be completed,—in order to be secure from the irritating and ignorant criticisms, to which artists are usually subjected by the loquacious *Cognoscenti*

of Rome ; and which, to a man of De Gérilly's delicate discrimination, and intense devotion to his art, were equally perplexing and humiliating. How have I seen him rave and fret, after a visit made to his studio by some Cardinal, overflowing with the cant of connoisseurship ; or some princely traveller, whose northern imagination had never been visited by the inspired dreams of art !

Early in my scholarship, I had entreated for exemption from the general sentence of exclusion from the Villa Ludovisi ; and to my great mortification, my petition had been rejected. Unaccustomed to meet with opposition in matters of such trifling import, my inclinations were stimulated to fresh curiosity by the obstacles I encountered ;—I renewed my request ; and again I was repulsed, and even with rudeness. “ I tell you, no ! Lavisier,” said the petulant old man, roughly seizing the palette which I was preparing by his side—“ Wait till the fogs of the Seine are dispelled from your boyish comprehension by the bright sun of Italy ; application, young man, ap-

plication and study must precede such presumptuous aspirations." Ungovernable in my temper, I was about to declare my name and rank and withdraw myself from his tuition ; but the dangers of my situation opportunely presented themselves to my remembrance ; and I contented myself with withdrawing behind the group of my fellow-students, and muttering between my teeth, " Accursed Villa ! I will visit thee at the risk of perdition !" I was roused from my angry mood by the whispers of one of my fellow-students, who from the first had made particular advances to obtain my friendship. " Be not over solicitous," said he, " to view this paltry staircase ; yonder old *fanatico* is jealous, even to dotage, of his own pitiful designs—visit the Palazzo Braschi ;—there, since you are an amateur of staircases, shall you behold one indeed—*scala stupenda—gigantesca* !" and he ran on in the cant of a hireling Cicerone, in praise of its red marble columns, till I was even weary of the theme. " I care not," said I, peevishly, " for the most splendid stair that has

been erected since the days of the Titans; but this Villa—this Hesperian garden, I will visit in spite of dragons fabled or breathing.” “ You must then supplicate the intercession of Andrea,” continued my officious friend; “ yon ill-shaped elf, who is soothing the ear of Geriglio by his clumsy adulation. He is about to become his son-in-law—and heir to his canvas, easels, and broad lands beside.”

“ And is the person of his intended bride assorted to his own loathsome ugliness ?”

“ That, indeed, I know not: none of us have been admitted into the domestic circle of our master; nor has the dignified seclusion which he has been pleased to maintain afflicted us deeply; for you must know, *maestro*,” said the young Roman, with a scornful inflexion of voice, “ that your countryman thought proper to select his wife among the most degraded of the people. The mother of the gentle Andrea’s future wife, Signore Lavisier, was a baptized Jew !” In the heat of my resentment against

Geriglio, I was secretly gratified by the knowledge of a fact so degrading ; and at the end of my lesson, I closed the door of the studio, with a determination never to visit it again till I had gratified my curiosity by a visit to the Villa Ludovisi Piombino.

The following day, being one devoted by Geriglio to his employment at the Villa, would I knew be unpropitious to the fulfilment of my intentions ; but the next morning, having excused myself on the pretext of indisposition from attending the academy, I sallied forth on my expedition ; and slowly, and on foot, I ascended the Pincian Hill, on the summit of which the villa is situated.

It was a pure balmy morning of the month of May, and all nature appeared wantoning in the excess of enjoyment. A gentle air agitated the broad leaves of the plane trees, which afforded a delicious refuge from the increasing heat of the sun ; and as I deliberately reached the commanding eminence, and beheld the city gradually un-

folded at my feet, the soothing influence of the summer atmosphere—the cloudless sky—the snatches of fragrance ever and anon bursting from the adjoining gardens of the Villa Medici, intoxicated my senses to the utmost emotion of dreamy enjoyment, and rendered me comparatively indifferent to the primary motive of my walk. To breathe in such an hour was almost enough for happiness.

I had no intention of presenting myself at the principal entrance of the villa, where I was sure to be repulsed by the denial of the custode; but having nearly completed the external circuit of the gardens, which are partly inclosed by the venerable walls of the ancient city, I discovered a low green door, opening to the Strada Pin-ciana; at which stood two mules, caparisoned as fitting to female service, and held by a boy, who reclined on a stone vase ornamenting the gate, overcome by sleep and the heat of the day. Silently I approached—the door, which was ajar, yielded to my touch;—I entered, and closed it

after me without molestation. The gardens of the villa now lay before me, in all the majesty of their loveliness; their shadowy walks contrasting with the glare of the scene without—their fragrant labyrinths shaming the dusty and polluted paths of the city. All was silent, in the repose of noontide sultriness. Even the busy hum of insect wings ceased to hover in the gleams of sunshine; and the very eternal grasshopper of Italy was silent for a season. Here and there, the spiral cypress detached itself from the luxuriant masses of the dark bay trees, or rose above the groups of glossy ilex; while the pine stood

Long-haired, and dark, and tall,
In lordly pride predominant o'er all.

Invited by the refreshing beauty of the scene, I followed the green alley which I had first entered, till a sudden turn brought me in view of a magnificent pavilion, placed about the centre of the gardens, and commanding an enchanting view towards the hills of Sabina and

Albano. The portal, which I approached through a splendid orangerie, whose blossoms, under the excitement of the sunshine, emitted a perfume almost too rich for endurance, was open; and impelled onwards, like some fabled victim of magic delusion, I entered the marble vestibule, ascended a small but elegant staircase, and passed through an antechamber hung with paintings, which at another moment might have arrested my observation. But I now hastened forward, and only paused on the threshold of the adjoining chamber, on perceiving it to be already tenanted by two females. For some minutes I stood there unobserved—both having their faces turned from the door: the one aged, and plainly dressed, was busily employed in knitting; the other in painting. The subject of her pencil was apparently some part of the exquisite group of the *Aurora* of *Guercino*, which adorned the ceiling; a piece already well-known to me by its high reputation, and which, among the cognoscenti of Rome, was frequently preferred to that of *Guido* himself.

I saw little of the person of the artist, which was enveloped in an ample drapery, till chancing to throw my eyes on an immense mirror opposite, her young and beautiful countenance was exhibited to my view, in the total unconsciousness of observation,—now throwing back the glossy raven hair which interrupted her view, as she bent over her work;—now raising her large and intelligent eyes towards the original;—and from her high and dazzling forehead, and the exquisite contour of her head, resembling a sybil in her hour of inspiration. Without pausing in her occupation, she addressed her companion in the silvery tone worthy the “*bocca Romana* ;” and in terms of the most expressive endearment, entreated her patience for one short hour ; “ For unless I am doubly diligent, dearest mother,” said she, “ my medallion will be incomplete for the appointed day ; and then, what will my father say to his negligent and ungrateful girl ! ” The elderly female, whose name I had discovered in the course of the dialogue, of which I had become an unintentional auditor, to be Monna

Lisana, was about to reply, when looking towards me, and uttering a loud exclamation of surprise, the fair artist suddenly rose, and let the painting on which she was occupied fall from her hands upon the marble floor. Instinctively I hastened to assist her in recovering it; and with the humblest apologies for my intrusion, which I represented as the accidental result of idleness and an open door, I succeeded in appeasing the momentary alarm of the ladies. By the assiduity of my address, I soon led the elder to the most garrulous enlargement upon her own first emotion of surprise and terror, and by the interest I displayed in the accident occasioned by my temerity, I soon induced the younger to listen to my suggestions for the reparation of the medallion, which I now held in my hands.

"It was a gift for my father on his birth-day," said my beautiful companion, with the tears standing in her eyes. "Will you permit me," I answered, "to retouch the blemish?" and taking the brush from her hand, with the freedom of more ad-

vanced intimacy, I soon restored the picture to its former state. It was the copy of a head of one of the Hours attendant on Aurora, most delicately and faithfully touched; but on restoring it to the owner, I was agitated by emotions at once too deep, and too respectful, to utter one compliment of common politeness. "The Signore is discontented with your performance, my Armina," cried Monna Lisana peevishly. "Alas!" replied she, "his masterly improvements on my work discover the hand of too experienced an artist."

Without disclaiming her praise, I strove to afford myself a decent pretext for continuing my unreasonable intrusion, by carefully examining, and then entering into a minute criticism of the various pictures decorating the apartment; drawing near the while to Armina's desk, where she was peaceably re-seated, and pursuing her employment. By dexterously maintaining the conversation on subjects of art, mingled with counsel as to the mode of her performance, I contrived to engage their

attention, till the striking of the time-piece reminded them of the necessity of departure. While I assisted the lovely stranger in the disposal and removal of her implements, I vainly strove by artful inquiries and suggestions, to discover her name and station. I was encouraged by her bewitching frankness of demeanour—a frankness far more consonant with true modesty, than the affected decorum and *minauderie* of my countrywomen—to hope that Armina would, at parting, acquaint me with the subject of my curiosity. Without once remembering the original object which had stimulated me to my present adventure, I accompanied the ladies through the gardens; and after passing through the same green door, which Monna Lisana locked with a master-key, I placed them on their mules; and, respectfully uncovered, stood to receive their parting salutations, which were however unaccompanied by the announcement I had half expected.

The lively old lady had parried my covert inquiries during our walk through the gardens

by questions tending towards the same object, with regard to myself. But I shrank from declaring the mean capacity I had assumed; more especially as the elegant address and refined language of the Lady Armina, as well as the richness of her well-chosen attire, announced her to belong to a more distinguished rank than her scanty retinue had at first suggested.

I stood rooted to the spot while they slowly descended the hill; and at length I returned to my dark and solitary home, where I passed that night and the following day in a state of feverish excitement—in re-considering my adventure, and in minutely recalling to mind every word, every look, every movement of the lovely vision I had so unexpectedly encountered; dwelling, with the irritability of a disordered state of feeling, now on the inexpressible charms of the beautiful Armina, now on my own intolerable dulness, in having failed to acquaint myself with her title and residence. The apparent domestication of the ladies in the Villa Ludovisi induced me at first

to imagine that they might form part of the family of the Cardinal Piombino. I therefore visited my hitherto contemned fellow-pupil, Andrea, in hopes of discovering, through his means, the various female connections of his Eminence.

In vain I attempted to move his natural dullness to a more communicative vein; it was only by the most tenacious perseverance that I wrung from him the names of such females of the Ludovisi family as had visited the atelier of Geriglio. "There was the Principessa Silvia, his sister,—the Contessina Elena his niece,—there were the Principesse Chigi and Colonna, his cousins."—"But their baptismal names" he knew not. The name of Armina was upon my lips; but from an emotion hitherto unknown to me, I dared not mention it before the low-born and ill-conditioned Andrea. After turning in my mind all possible expedients by which to trace my incognita, I determined on returning, at the same hour, to the gate of the Strada Pinciana; for I had observed that the medallion was still incomplete.

How did my heart beat against my bosom when, as I approached the garden door, I beheld the well-remembered mules, and the page in his faded livery ! He was no longer asleep ; but boldly, and with a right of entrance, I attempted to push open the door. Alas ! it was carefully bolted within, and I was greeted by the insulting laughter of the urchin.

“ By what right,” exclaimed I, vehemently, hoping to deceive him, “ by what right is the door closed this morning ? ”

“ By the will of my mistress,” retorted the boy, “ who holds the key.”

“ And her name ? ”

“ When I have received her orders to communicate it to your Excellency, I shall inform you.”

I was about to seize the mule-whip from the little miscreant’s hand, when remembering that a broil with her servant would be no favourable introduction to the notice of Armina, I repressed my indignation ; and retired to a distance, resolved to wait the passing of my unknown friends.

In about half an hour I heard the tinkling of the small ornamental bells attached to the neck-piece of the mules. I advanced. The ladies, in defiance of the heat of the day, were veiled with even more than Roman punctilio; nothing was visible but the small white hand of Armina, closing the folds of her black *faldetta*. They passed, but looked not towards me; while angrily protesting that I would not a second time be defeated, I slowly followed them. Many were the palaces, many were the distinguished abodes which we passed, and which I secretly hoped to see entered by the objects of my pursuit. At length we approached the *Ghetto degli Ebrai*, the detested quarter of the Jews. My breath came short—‘it is merely a passage,’ said I to myself, ‘towards a nobler vicinage.’ But no! by all that was tormenting and accursed, they paused before the portal of a mean habitation, dismounted, and vanished from my sight. There too vanished the vague chimeras of my dream! My princess—she in whom I had traced every distinctive mark

of innate nobility—in whose every elegant phrase I had discerned the purity of lofty lineage—all, alas! for my penetration—all had centered in the nameless daughter of an obscure Jew! The very name struck me with new disgust, from the force of contrast.

I now recalled to mind the person of my enchantress; but it was only to exaggerate, with malicious self-humiliation, the clustering richness of her jetty hair, and her commanding features and clear brown complexion. This was the first delusion of the kind that had really touched my feelings; and my disappointment at its abrupt termination was proportionably great. I had nearly attained the age of twenty-one; and I had been hitherto a stranger to the true fascination of female charms. The scenes of riot and dissipation through which I had passed had fortunately shed over my mind only a temporary corruption. I had turned from them with disgust, and I was secretly sensible that I had better feelings in my nature than I had yet exercised;

that there were flowers among the rank weeds which dishonoured my desert heart. These feelings I had been about to lavish upon Armina, but the transient madness was over.

It was not in my nature to exist without an object—an aim to qualify the monotony of my existence. I perceived by my father's letters, forwarded to me from Venice, by Monsieur de Tervines, that I was destined to pass another year on my travels, and I discovered at the same time, from his own, that many months must elapse before he could safely rejoin me. These I determined to pass in study, and in improving myself in the fine arts; and thus I trusted that my forced abode in Rome would not be utterly lost to me.

Stimulated by this burst of ambition, I returned with renewed ardour to the studio of Geriglio, and for some weeks laboured with such patient assiduity, that I more than regained my former place in his esteem. Thus re-instated, I was invited by my fellow-students to join them in an intended compliment to our master, by pre-

senting him with a laurel crown on his approaching birth-day, when he would attain his sixtieth year. A member of the band was destined to recite a complimentary sonnet on the occasion; one of those ready-made inspirations, so readily procured at Rome. Unwilling to degrade myself to the level of those with whom I associated only for an especial and temporary purpose, I declined their proposition; but when they represented the probable mortification of the old man on missing his favourite scholar and countryman among his partisans, I agreed to join in the ceremony; and to this end, I accompanied them to our master's house on the appointed morning.

We were shown into an elegantly appointed chamber, ornamented, as became its owner, with models from all the most celebrated statues of antiquity, and spirited copies in outline of the most distinguished pictures of modern artists. There were flowers disposed among these trophies of art; and musical instruments were scattered about—it was altogether a fitting retreat for taste

and genius. The old man entered, and received our offering with equal politeness and sensibility; but while he patiently listened to the trite effusion which was pompously recited by Andrea, my eyes were riveted upon his person. Over his sober but rich suit of black velvet, hung a massive gold chain, to which was suspended the medallion of the Villa Ludovisi! Armina then—*my* Armina—was, after all, the daughter of Geriglio!

This connection at once accounted for the familiar rights I had seen her exercise in the Villa Ludovisi; nor could I be surprised at having traced to the *Ghetto degli Ebrai* the daughter of “a baptized Jew.” I could no longer deceive myself with the hope of finding in the lady of my thoughts a fitting bride for the heir of the house of L——; but with other, and newly-awakened expectations, I determined on obtaining access to the domestic circle of my master. At first, with the natural prejudice of birth and education in favour of the distinctions of nobility, I resolved privately to declare my real name, and to entrust

him with the secret of my incognito. But my knowledge of the peculiarities of Geriglio's mind soon gave a different turn to my conclusions. A democrat in his political principles, a zealous defender of popular rights, and an enthusiastic worshipper of the arts, I knew that, in his estimation, one single attribute of genius would far outweigh the highest grade of earthly honour to be bestowed by King or Kaiser. He had long and openly declared that he should seek his son-in-law among those of his own station—namely, among the artists of Rome; and as he was known to have amassed a considerable fortune, and to be on the point of retiring from his professional labours, I had more than once heard the hand of the daughter of Geriglio mentioned as an object of emulation among the Roman artists. With such a man, therefore, the name of the Marquis de L—— was more likely to procure a sentence of exclusion, and to awake his suspicions of my designs upon his daughter, than the simple announcement of the painter Lavisier.

Under this impression, I commenced my operations by devoting all the powers of my pencil to the completion of a painting, representing the pavilion scene of the Villa Ludovisi. The beautiful figure of Armina, with the bright effulgence of inspiration shed upon her brow ; the rich background of the ornamented Belvedere ; the figure of the old lady, relieved by a stream of light which fell from the window near which she sat knitting, afforded objects for a striking composition ; and the inspired memory of a lover enabled me to form a most remarkable likeness of the principal object of my study. I laboured with the persevering ardour of enthusiasm. My picture was scarcely conceived and designed, before it was richly framed, and hanging in the private gallery of Geriglio ; while the fortunate artist, caressed and applauded, was peaceably seated in his domestic circle, and enjoying the conscious smiles of the beautiful Armina.

CHAPTER IV.

“I own *my* love imperfect—all
That mortals by that name miscall;
But say—oh! say,—*hers* was not guilt.”—BYRON.

“I AM now, Gustave, approaching a period of my recital which I would willingly pass over as briefly as the necessity for your perfect comprehension of the circumstances may allow. But I will neither screen myself from your condemnation by a partial disclosure, nor, by affecting to regard the infatuations of my youth with the cold and contemptuous eye of reason,—teach you to undervalue the influence of the strongest, the most intoxicating of all excitations, the passion of love. Even now that the tenor of my mind is framed by far more important considerations, I cannot but turn with wonder to the remembrance

of those days when every thought—every wish, every hope—centered in my beautiful Armina; when my last invocation, as I closed my eyes in sleep, was to her; and when, as I awoke in the morning, her half-formed name still hovered like a spell upon my lips;—and I, who had approached her society with the plans and expectations of a demon, became, in my turn, a mere slave to her attractions, and the most intense and devoted of lovers. For if I had been startled by the first illusion of her marvellous grace and loveliness, how were my feelings excited, and my heart overcome, by the gradual unfolding of the glorious gifts of that noble soul—by those charms of mind, which, though “yielded with sweet delay,” in turn bewildered, in turn enchanted my observation.

Armina, born and cherished among the haunts of the great of old, appeared to have unconsciously imbibed the heroism and magnanimity of the mighty dead.—Armina, dwelling in her maturity among the finest inspirations of art—breathing

the very air of poetry, and stimulated by the continual excitement of glory and fame, the aim and end of all around her,—seemed to have snatched the bright flame of genius from the ever-burning altars of Italy. Like the favourite statue of the sculptor—not only framed of the most spotless materials, and fashioned in the purest idealism of beauty, but bright with the polish of the master-hand!—the favour of the Creator still apparently lingering around his glorious work.

One principal charm of the character of Armina consisted in the total absence of worldly cant, and worldly usages. For this she was indebted to the strict seclusion in which she had been educated by her father. The peculiarities of her mother's connections—she herself having died in the childhood of Armina—had prevented the necessity of family re-unions; and excepting her grand aunt, Monna Lisana, and the old nurse who had watched over her from infancy, she had not a single acquaintance in Rome. Her father's approbation had been the only reward

for her ceaseless labours in literary pursuits—her father's house had been the theatre where her talents had been fostered and applauded ; and like a flower gifted by nature with nought but loveliness and fragrance, she had blossomed from childhood to maturity in the shadow of solitude. No young Indian from the most remote wilderness, could boast a more uncontaminated heart. Was it wonderful that a being so gifted should joyfully welcome the stranger destined to cross unexpectedly the solitary path of her existence,—should receive with gratitude the first assurances of affection,—and willingly consent to divide her burden of joys and sorrows with one so warmly desirous of participating in both.

“I know not why I weep,” whispered she, when one evening sitting together to wait the arrival of her father in the Ludovisian gardens, I had surprised her into a confession of her feelings towards me ; “I should not weep, La-visier, for surely I may consider myself an

especial favourite of fortune. First among my joys, let me reckon that of being a native of Italy; of being permitted to say when I look around me, like the tomb of Poussin's Grecian maiden, 'And I, too, lived in Arcadia.' Secondly, that I share the undivided affection of an indulgent and intelligent father—of one equally desirous and capable of instructing me; so that of all I know, and all I feel, I am nought indebted to the care of an hireling. And lastly, Armand, and most important of all, now that my dear father, in his age, had begun to seek a companion for himself, and a wedded protector for his child, thou, my beloved, the friend of whom I have dreamt in my loneliness, hast fallen among us; and I am spared the misery of being bestowed on one, who might perhaps have accepted me for my dowry, and then have taken little thought of poor Armina. But thou wilt rescue me from becoming a neglected wife, a household drudge;—for thy pursuits—thy feelings—thy peaceable demeanour, assimilate with my own.

The commendations of my father long ago interested me in his favourite scholar, and to him I owe, with every other good gift, the friendship of Lavisier.

“And thou wilt assist me,” continued the agitated girl, “in soothing and in amusing his old age; already he considers thy presence necessary to the happiness of his domestic circle—already he begins to class us together in his terms of endearment. He calls us ‘his children,’ Lavisier.”

“Yea—and such, dearest, shall we be, in word and in deed;—together, we may support him in his declining years; together, Armina, all tasks will be easy, all employments delightful. I have sought and found the object of my first and only attachment; I have won—may I not say so?—the affections of Armina, and the good-will of her father, and what have we now to fear?”

It is true, that I was conscious of being the subject of Geriglio’s careful consideration; and I saw that he was fully aware of my passion for his daughter. I believed, too, that he destined

me her hand ; a gift that would have been rich in every sense to the obscure Lavisier ; but I also saw that he was slow to commit the charge of one so beloved to a person imperfectly known to him—and moreover, that he was too proud to permit a prize so noble to be won unsought. He had too much delicacy of mind to bestow that as a benefactor, which he wished should be received only with the warmth of a lover.

My own feelings and intentions I dare not so scrupulously analyse. I believe—*I trust* that from the moment of my domestication in the family of Geriglio, I had ceased to entertain any dishonourable views upon his daughter. Armina was herself too pure a being for any one to approach her with licentious expectations. Although timid and playful as a child, in the ordinary intercourse of life, I dared no more rouse and encounter the scorn of that lofty brow, than the anger of heaven itself ; for though she was several years younger than myself, she was far above me in strength of mind, and decision of

character. Those better purposes, those honourable principles of action which were with me the result of deliberation and self-inquiry, were instinctive in her correct understanding and upright heart. Thus, while I dwelt with Armina apart from the tumult of the world, and had leisure to make myself fully acquainted with the virtues of the woman I loved, I wanted energy; I wanted candour, to throw off the mask I had assumed—to declare myself high in fortune and descent, and then combat, as best I might, the difficulties by which I was beset. Content to revel in that most exquisite of earthly enjoyments, a first and requited affection, I knew that discovery might at any moment overtake me; but lost in a dream of love, I thought not or cared not for the result.

In the mean time, the summer season was passing deliciously away, in the society of those I loved, and in the constant interchange of vows of faith and affection. Our evenings were passed together; now in an excursion to the

classic haunts of the ancient city—now in invoking the spirit of Numa in the grotto of Egeria. —Sometimes we rested after our ride in the mausoleum of Cecilia Metella; and often Armina would enchant her adoring father, by sportively assuming the semblance of an ancient priestess, as we traversed some ruined temple of antiquity; or throw her graceful figure into the attitude of some celebrated statue, and occupy a niche in the bath or building we were exploring, with the enthusiasm of brethren of the art. At other times, her ready pencil would lend fresh grace to the picturesque groups of peasant girls, who surrounded us with offerings of fruit and flowers, when we were tempted by the loveliness of the weather to pass our entire day on the banks of the Anio; while she, in her sportive gaiety, would, in her turn, join in their dance on the turf, for the amusement of the delighted Geriglio.

The health of the old man, which had given him frequent warnings to desist from the sedentary habits of his early life, was now seriously

impaired; and having completed his engagement with the Prince Piombino, and gratified his honest pride by receiving the gratulations of all the distinguished artists, his contemporaries in Rome, on his perfect success, he resolved to avoid his usual residence during the trying season of the mal'aria, and for this end, by the advice of his patron, his friend, the banker Dorlaschi, he hired a villa near Terni.

Hither he earnestly invited me to accompany him; and with ill-repressed feelings of exultation I found myself dwelling under the same roof with the object of my passionate attachment—sharing, with the ease of domestic familiarity, the cares of Armina for the comfort of her father, and his daily lessons to his beloved child. It appeared that, before he quitted Rome, he had received warnings of approaching dissolution which he had lacked courage to communicate to either of us: for on parting with Dorlaschi he had placed a favourite antique ring upon his finger; and had presented him, as a last bequest, with the finest painting

in his gallery—his own picture of the massacre of the Innocents, for which he had twice refused an immense sum offered by the Grand Duke of Tuscany. He had himself a peculiar cause for his predilection for this work ; he had copied the infant in the foreground, on whose bosom a centurion has placed his foot, from his own Armina ; and the mother of the martyred babe, from his own wife. The child presented a model of infantine grace and loveliness ; and in the mother, he had national traits of great beauty, which well enabled her to represent the persecuted Jewish matron.

The presentiments of the old man did not deceive him. Instead of deriving benefit from the change of air, his disorder appeared hourly to gain ground on his constitution ; and as his mind became depressed from indisposition, he could no longer conceal the anxieties which weighed on his mind ; nor repress his impatience for the marriage which he considered necessary to secure the welfare of his orphan daughter. “ Lavisier,” said he, one

night, as we were all three sitting together under his portico, in the stillness of moonlight: "Lavisier, I must not permit a mistimed delicacy to prolong these days of courtship and punctilio, and rob me of the delight I shall experience in bestowing upon you the treasure you covet. It is from the living hand of Geriglio, you must receive that of Armina—it is before the anxious ear of a father; that you must breathe your vows to protect my child, when all other earthly protectors shall be withdrawn from her. Send for a notary—nay, no remonstrances, young man! I know all that you would urge of your inequality of fortune; but you are rich, Lavisier—rich, in integrity—in talent—and in affection for my girl; and as such, I would have selected you for her husband, had all the peers of France and all the nobles of Italy competed for her choice. Take her, Armand—and may God give his blessing to both, as I do!"

Would I could have summoned courage to reject his tender benediction—to render back his

precious gift—and to smite the heart of the aged man with disappointment and death, as I was thereafter destined to do that of his child. I shuddered with conscious shame, when I affixed a fictitious name to the legal instrument by which he made over to us, jointly, the entire reversion of his rich possessions; subject to no condition, but relying absolutely on the honor of his son-in-law;—and still deeper were my emotions, when, on the following day, I pronounced those vows at the foot of the altar, whose infraction I already virtually contemplated. But the deed was done; and as I folded my agitated bride to my bosom, and hailed her as my own—my precious Armina, I could scarcely consider in its true enormity the act which enriched me with so dear a right!

The certainty of our union, and the ecstasy of happiness which now daily presented itself to his view, appeared to renovate for a season the enfeebled health of Geriglio. To behold our satisfaction—our mutual affection, was to him as

the unfolding of a bright page of the futurity of his child ; while the calm serenity of

A mind at peace with all below,—
A heart whose love is innocent,

spread over the beautiful person of Armina a matron gentleness, a new and distinct expression of womanly modesty, which ever commanded from her husband the respectful tenderness of a lover. What an inexpressible charm—what moments of unsought and unexpected enchantment, does an intelligent and feeling woman possess the secret of distributing over the sober monotony of existence ! What bursts of enthusiasm may she command—what tears of gratified affection may she call forth, while in turn commanding with the gentle rule of prevailing love, or serving with the meek but unhumiliating duty of a wife ! In such accomplishments—in such powers—how gifted—how powerful was Armina de Gerilly ! Oh ! God of mercy ! can it be that, while basking in the sunshine of her love, I meditated to

return such generous—such hallowed—such unqualified affection with ruin and desertion !

We passed one happy year in our retirement ; that first year of wedded joy, which we trust to each succeeding one to resemble,—but which—fearless—confiding—rapturous as it is—can never dawn again on the weary sameness of after-life ! Geriglio lived to hold a grandson in his arms, and expired in the calm security arising from a well-spent and honourable life. Must I confess that, in one point of view, I derived satisfaction from the death of my benefactor ? I knew that the hour was at hand, which must of necessity unveil my deception ; I knew the difficulties I should have to encounter from my family in the legalization of my marriage ;—and I rejoiced that I should be spared the mortification of witnessing the indignation of one honest heart—the angry contempt of a father, whom an impostor had robbed of his child. But with my Armina, my gentle and confiding wife, I trusted that the voice of love might prevail, to restore me to affection and trust.

Monsieur de Tervines, the companion of my excesses, the remote source of all my errors, was no more. I had received and transmitted to France as accurate a detail as was required of the circumstances of his decease ; and at the moment of Geriglio's peaceful departure, I was on the rack, in hourly expectation of a summons from the Duc de L——, to return to Paris. Fortunately for my designs, the will of my father-in-law directed an immediate sale of his estates and effects ; in order to enable us to make an extended tour through the principal countries of Europe, which he knew to be the ardent desire of his daughter. “ When youthful curiosity is once fairly satiated,” he would say, “ you will return, with enlarged views, and a corrected judgment, to pass the remainder of your days in the great city—the sanctuary of the arts ; and my children's children will learn to reverence the name of Geriglio, among the palaces of Rome.”

In consideration of her father's expressed de-

sign, I had little difficulty in persuading Armina to accompany me immediately to Paris; and still less—with the readiness of a now practised deceiver, in framing a plausible excuse for expediting our departure. Her recent affliction, and her cares for the lovely infant at her bosom, prevented all inclination for a mere tour of taste or pleasure; yet when, in the excitement occasioned by the fine scenery of Switzerland, through which we passed, the first smile passed over her countenance, she could not forbear exclaiming, as she rested her head on my bosom—“ This—this indeed, dear Armand, has been the dream of my life—to visit these romantic countries, and taste in its most intense rapture the beauty of nature, shared by the heart of my only and best beloved.” “ And you are willing,” I replied, in the hope of eliciting some sentiment favourable to the disclosure I meditated, “ you are willing and content, Armina, to enter the native country of your father and husband, as the wife of an obscure individual? You,—whose rich portion might have

insured a titled lover? Can you be satisfied, dearest, to join the mean circle to which I shall be obliged to present you? Will there be no feeling of disappointment—of blighted ambition, when——”

“Thy country is my country—and thy God my God”—answered she, in the language of Scripture—“and shall not thy kindred and thy friends be mine also? Wouldst thou believe,” continued my wife smiling mournfully, “that the mediocrity of thy station was a glorious gift in my sight? and that my very heart throbbed for joy when I knew thee to be but the student Lavisier? When first I saw thee, all stranger as thou wert, in the Pavilion, I trembled with the fear that thou wert of too high a station to bend thy thoughts to the daughter of Geriglio. With the vain blindness of love, methought I saw in thee a look of nobleness, an air of courteous condescension, which augured of high birth;—say, dearest, was I not discerning? *Now*, Lavisier, I can smile as I think of this;—but it was grief and terror to

me *then* ;—for I had been haunted from my youth upwards with the dread that I should scorn an alliance with one of my own class ; and rashly fix my affections, where my presumption could hope for no return.” “ A woman’s chimera—Armina—a visionary fear.”—“ Visionary,—but dreadful to my expectations—oh ! of all griefs—of all humiliation—all sorrow—save me from that of unrequited love—of desertion—of——” I stopped her by my caresses—for it was a theme on which every word uttered by my wife pierced me to the soul.

We travelled hastily through France ; and in a few weeks, having settled my wife and child at St. Mandé, in a small country-house, which afforded a facility at once to their utter seclusion, and to my own constant visits to Paris, I returned to the frontier, and once more openly pursued my route to the capital, equipped and attended as became the heir of the house of L——.

CHAPTER V.

“ Oh ! wander, boundless love, across the wild !
Crib not thyself in *cities*—for 'tis there
The thrifty, grey philosopher inhabits,
To check thy glowing impulse in his child !
Gain is the old man's god ;—he offers up
His issue to't, and mercenary wedlock
Murders his offspring's peace !—They murdered mine !”
COLMAN.

“ WITH what emotion did I approach the capital of my native country ! I had left it a boy—in mind and in feelings, if not in stature ;—but now, how painful a maturity had my heart attained ! A husband and a father—a chartered citizen of another land—by chance an abettor of murder—by choice a base and degraded deceiver—how various were the qualifications which had attached themselves to my name !—What torrents of changeful passion had rolled over my mind—by turns ferti-

lizing and desolating its uncultured soil ! But of these, love, and love only had been the abiding influence. Fostered perhaps in the first instance by the romantic incidents among which it had arisen, and deriving fresh force from the untoward chances which continually threatened me with detection, that passion, which usually declines in its power from security and gratification, had with me been hourly stimulated by danger and uncertainty. There might be something too in the force of contrast. I was an enthusiast ;—and I gloried in the chance that had enabled me,—*me*, a French noble of the highest class, and consequently fettered by every tie that *convenance*, or the accursed trammels of society could invent, to inspire and enjoy a disinterested passion in a station of life where the absence of all social form and etiquette had enhanced its enjoyments a thousand-fold. I felt, too, as if I had triumphed over the vain-glory of my real position in the world—as if I had marked my scorn of the empty honors that had fixed themselves upon me ;—as if—fool

that I was !—I had looked beyond the vain prejudices of my age, and advocated by my example the honorable equality of my fellow-creatures. With what self-gratulation I promised myself to support the rights of the wife of my choice, and to hold her blameless through all that envy and malice might suggest to disunite us !

I was welcomed by my father and mother with distinguished kindness ; and the improvements in my person and address were noted with the most flattering assiduity. I could perceive, however, by various trifling signs, that they were better acquainted with the circumstances of my removal from Venice than I could have wished ; and I had no difficulty in obtaining from them a handsome addition to the pension which I had already secured to the family of Tervines. I observed, from the affected carelessness of my mother's inquiries, that the mystery in which I had enveloped my sojournment at Rome had completely baffled the penetration of their emissaries ; and although the resident ambassador of France had

been able to certify that the Marquis de L—— had never made his appearance in the higher circles of Rome, the painter Lavisier, obscure and unassuming, had attracted no suspicions of his identity. I discovered, too, that the immediate occasion of my recal to France was the conclusion of a more formal treaty between my father and the Maréchal de Viry.

Mademoiselle de Viry, my destined bride, being in a delicate state of health, was about to depart for Nice, where she had been advised to pass the winter months; and it was proposed by our respective families that previous to her departure our betrothment should take place. This I positively declined; and as I dared not at once unfold the reason of my refusal, it was fortunate that the precarious condition of the young lady afforded me an honourable pretext for my determination. "If," I observed, "Mademoiselle de Viry should be happily restored to her family and friends, it would still be time enough to conclude our union; if otherwise, it would be

needless to fetter her father's estates by engagements which could not ultimately be fulfilled."

My mother considered this argument as arising from an excess of romantic generosity; and sought, by all those arts of persuasion of which she was consummately mistress, to alter my determination.

I can scarcely imagine a more perfect specimen of beauty in maturity, of courtly dignity in the graceful season of middle age, than was at this time presented by the Duchesse de L—. Supple and designing, she was enabled to assume at will a finished semblance of feeling and virtue. That scrupulous adherence to etiquette, which in her youth had shed an air of formality over her beauty, yielded now an additional and appropriate grace to her expanded figure and dignified deportment; while her place, as first Lady of Honour to her Majesty, rendered her intimate knowledge of the necessary forms of representation, and her delicate tact in the difficulties of managing the ceremonies of a royal interior, a most desirable accomplishment. By

her successful intrigues, she had already obtained lucrative and honourable posts for my father and herself, as well as for many others of her family.

It was towards the aggrandizement of her son that the restless energies of her ambitious mind were now directed ; and as the first step towards obtaining a permanent influence over my will, she endeavoured, by the most soothing and attentive deference, the most artful and winning assurances of affection, to awaken that filial tenderness, of which she had hitherto utterly neglected the cultivation. I own I was, for a while, attracted and affected by her caresses. It was new to me to be regarded as a personal object of deference ; for in the family of Geriglio, however prized and loved, I could not but be considered as an obliged individual, elevated to my situation by patronage and generosity. I was gratified, therefore, I was *proud* of being the subject of respectful and affectionate solicitude. I wished, in my mean vanity, that Armina could be a witness to the adoration I received, that she might learn her affection had

not been bestowed upon the neglected and obscure being she imagined.

But I soon obtained an insight into my lady mother's principles of action. When I departed from France, she had found me a mere puppet in her hands, yielding implicitly to her directions; and she was now evidently surprised to find that puppet endued with the energies of manhood—defeating her machinations, and resisting her authority. Instead of meeting my opposition with an open defiance and exertion of power, which she judged would but stimulate a character like mine to further opposition, this wary woman, whose imperturbable presence of mind and indefatigable perseverance fitted her for the sphere of art and falsehood in which she was destined to move, endeavoured, by mastering the ruling passion of my heart, and feeding me with flattery and caresses, to possess herself of my master-springs of action. I fell into the snare; and believing that I had hitherto undervalued the womanly qualifications of my mother, I decided that in the

cultivation of her maternal tenderness stood my only chance of reconciling my family to my marriage.

My frequent and prolonged absences from St. Germain's were the first objects of suspicion. Instructed by the servants who had tracked my steps at her suggestion, although the strict seclusion of Armina had screened her from their observation, she believed my time to be spent in the society of an Italian mistress;—some artful woman, she concluded, who had deeply entangled me; and who was no further to be dreaded, according to her courtly estimation, than as an immediate source of expense, and a probable cause of the delay of my marriage. My mother frequently suggested to me that, in the existing state of society, none but brutal vices or glaring indecencies were disreputable; that the connexion I had formed, if not imprudently exhibited, would afford no obstacle with the family of Mademoiselle de Viry; our marriage being one of mere arrangement, and by no means necessitating a close domestication. “You will

bestow your name upon the heiress of Viry," said my mother, "your affections will rest at St. Mandé; and happy the bride who has no greater cause for complaint than a pre-engaged heart." Indignant as I felt at the callous profligacy of the Duchess, and at similar suggestions when pointed towards my Armina, I knew that a statement of the real nature of her claims would only aggravate the evil.

The next manœuvre of the Duchess de L—— was to lessen the length and frequency of my visits to St. Mandé, by entangling me in the diversions of the court; and when she saw me skilfully avoid all opportunities of distinction among the satellites of royalty, she intrigued so successfully during my absence, and gave so favourable a colouring to the romantic diffidence which she had represented as being the foible of my character, that I perpetually found myself included, now in the select hunting parties of his Majesty,—now in the *Quadrilles de Costume*, principally filled by the numerous members of

the royal family ; and lastly, in the magnificent *carrousel*, which was at that time preparing under the directions of the king himself.

To my shame, I must acknowledge that these engagements, which were at first irksome, soon began to assume importance in my eyes, and ended by being coveted as honourable distinctions. I was still at the age when such vain pleasures acquire a fictitious importance ; and the intoxication of pleasure, which had been sobered for a season, was again renewing its blandishments, till the sacred engagements by which I was restrained lost their absolute importance in my estimation. I lamented the time I had dissipated during my stay at Rome—I even lamented the precipitate measure by which I had embroiled my affairs, and finally excluded myself from the state of society in which my destiny had been appointed. Under the influence of such worldly considerations, my visits to St. Mandé became less frequent ; and the lowly dwelling of my wife contrasted painfully with the brilliant scenes in

which I was now engaged. The gorgeous galleries of St. Germain—the glitter of gems—the waving of plumes—the splendour of an illustrious court, in that its most splendid moment, when the gallantry of a youthful monarch summoned around him, like the wand of an enchanter, all that was fairest and brightest in creation—cast a comparative gloom over the neat but unadorned chamber where Armina patiently awaited the return of her truant husband. Nay, to my disgrace I must confess, that in her simple garb of white, with unadorned tresses, although woven after the graceful busts of antique beauty, I missed with regret those ornaments and devices of wealth and splendour which began to appear in my sight as the necessary badges of nobility.—While she—the confiding, the gentle wife—now about to become, for the second time, a mother, appeared to forget in the joy of my arrival all the wearisome dulness of her lonely existence ;—and as I knelt at her feet to receive the kiss of welcome through my parted hair, I used to feel

the glad tears steal over my brow, as she exclaimed exultingly to the Italian nurses I had placed about her, " Ah ! did I not tell you that the beloved would return to-night !" and in such moments, with the arms of Armina around me, and my boy nestling in my bosom, I did indeed despise the vain allurements which I had recently quitted with regret !

I had persuaded my wife that my presence was continually required in the city, for the furtherance of a law-suit which involved the whole of my patrimony, as well as my family credit. Unsuspicious as innocence could make her, her easy credulity furthered my designs ; and in the trust that my diligence might conclude the affair before the approach of that appointed hour of peril, in which my presence would be doubly valuable, she even urged the frequent necessity of my absence ; and while recommending the most diligent watchfulness over her health to her Italian attendants, I appeared to acquiesce in her suggestions—and was content to forsake the society of this interesting woman,

for companionship with those who would have held her but as the base dust they trampled beneath their feet.

I have said enough, Gustave, to lead you to imagine that my appearance at court was what is there termed successful ;—but that success was not without its qualifications. I am not apprehensive that you should attribute any part of that which I am now about to relate to the indiscretion of a boastful vanity ; mine is a tale too deep—too terrible to admit of one idle or frivolous interruption. In acquainting you with such circumstances as are needful to its conclusion, I violate no secrecy—I betray no trust ; such favours as are bestowed under the observation of a jealous and calumnious court, are not likely to have escaped either notice or comment.

At the period of my arrival from Italy, two rival factions divided the court of Versailles. I should scarcely, however, term them thus ; for the Duchesse de la Vallière was of too retiring, too strictly feminine a character, to become the leader

of a party ; or to oppose even the necessary caution and defiance of an adversary to the haughty Madame de Montespan. At the moment to which I allude, Madame de la Vallière, although still retaining the distinction of "*Maitresse en titre*," was generally supposed to have been superseded in the affections of the king by her perfidious, but brilliant and beautiful rival. The latter, indeed, could boast of a long train of parasites, who looked to her influence for their advancement ; and she was known to be audacious in forwarding the interests of her followers, as she was insatiable in the consideration of her own : but the gentle la Vallière was followed in her deserted solitude by the blessings of the poor, and by the warm affection of a few chosen friends : she was surrounded by adorers ; while the reigning favourite could boast only a multitude of partizans.

The disgrace, for such it was called, of that lovely woman, so well defined by my friend, Madame de Sévigné, as "*l'humble violette qui se*

cache sous l'herbe," had even for a moment decreased the popularity of the king. A mistress who had been betrayed into his arms by personal and credulous affection; who, ever alive to the shame of her situation, continually sought to reconcile herself to the God she had offended, by active benevolence, by modest retirement,—whose greatness had been "thrust upon her," and who had never exerted her influence over the mind of Louis, save in the cause of virtue, had been easily pardoned by the people. But in Athénaïs de Montespan, they saw only a shameless courtesan, who had fled from the arms of her husband; and having excited the jealousy of his Majesty, had roused him to his first act of tyranny—the exile of the Marquis de Montespan. She omitted no display which could wound the sensibility of the queen—she exhibited a wanton waste of splendour offensive to the people at large; while, with the native insolence of an overbearing character, aided by an acute and ready wit, she delighted to brave and insult all

those whom she considered as belonging to the opposite party.

Such was the interior of the court at the period of my presentation ; and although, in that palace of pleasure, where idleness finds so ready a resource in the circulation of the lie of the day, I was speedily instructed in such details, I was scarcely prepared for a scene I witnessed, the very first time I appeared at the evening circle of the queen*.

The king had recently returned victorious from the conquest of Flanders, which he had attempted in right of her Majesty ; and it was judged that, on an occasion so flattering to her pride, the whole court should attend to offer their congratulations. Louis had even exacted that Madame de la Vallière, who, for some time had desisted from her attendance, should appear on this occasion. I had never as

* I am indebted more perhaps to Madame de Genlis's popular novels, for the following details, than to the *Mémoires* of the time ; which are, however, closely followed in the works in question.—The circumstances attending the death of Madame are also detailed at length in Madame de la Vallière.

yet beheld that celebrated beauty ; and as she was not so utterly lost in the interest of her royal lover as she afterwards became, I prepared myself to behold in her the admired of all observers, the only woman whom, according to the declaration of his confidant, the Duc de Lauzun, Louis had really loved. I was standing behind the circle of her Majesty, which was composed of Madame de Montespan, the Duchesse de Richelieu, and all the most illustrious women of the court, when a very lovely and graceful woman, pale and pensive in countenance, and, from some natural defect, rather faltering in her gait, slowly approached Her Majesty, by whom she was received with stern and repulsive coldness. A malignant whisper immediately circulated through the group of which I formed a part : the ladies surrounding the Queen preserved the most reserved silence ; while the lovely stranger stood near them for several minutes, irresolute and sorrowful,—her naturally fair complexion becoming paler and paler. At

length the painful vicinity to those who evidently scorned to address her, became too embarrassing ; and directing her tottering steps to the further end of the chamber, she stood leaning in solitary agitation against the tapestry.

“ Who is yonder interesting creature ? ” I inquired of my father, in a whisper.

“ Silence, for God’s sake ! ” he answered, in the same tone ; “ it is Madame de la Vallière.”

“ Can it be possible,” I replied, “ that one so recently courted and admired should have fallen into this state of unmerited desertion ? ”

My father again interrupted me, trembling with alarm lest my indiscreet burst of sympathy should be overheard ; but fortunately, the only auditor, the Duc de Longueville, was too warmly interested in the object of my enthusiasm to be dangerous.

“ You have not, I believe,” said the Duke, turning towards me, “ the happiness of being acquainted with Madame la Duchesse de la Vallière : have you courage—have you generosity

enough to be presented to her at this trying moment ?”

I expressed myself grateful for his offer ; and, in spite of the detaining hand laid by my father on my sleeve, I followed the Duc de Longueville with a firm step across the presence-chamber ; and I was more than repaid for the scornful smile of the ladies of the circle, and the significant glances of the courtiers, when I perceived tears standing in those inexpressibly soft blue eyes, which were lifted from the ground on our approach. Few were the words that passed among us. The duchess, who was only waiting the arrival of the king to retire to the relief of solitary tears, was silent from emotion ;—Longueville, who had long been passionately attached to her, and the offer of whose hand she had lately again rejected, was equally so from sympathy. But on a sudden, the folding-doors were thrown open ; the king, brilliant as natural grace and recent triumph could render him, entered ; and having paid his respects to her Majesty, and a

passing tribute to the lovely group by which she was surrounded, cast his eyes round the apartment, and, with the instinctive tact of one accustomed to a life of observation, instantly became aware of all that was passing—the triumph of gratified malice, and the isolation of the suffering woman who was there but in patient obedience to his commands. He instantly broke from the brilliant Athénaïs, who was exerting all the piquant originality of her wit for his diversion ; and approaching the duchess, with an air of equal interest and deference, he placed himself by her side for the remainder of the evening—naming for his hocca table, Madame de la Vallière, Longueville, and myself.

How beautiful a glow soon overspread her dejected countenance !—not from the empty triumph of gratified vanity ; but from the awakened hopes of a perfect affection—it was Louis, not the king, whom she loved ; and it was by him that she had been tenderly rescued from the persecution of the assembled court. This trifling incident led

to some of the most important incidents of my life.

Among the personal enemies of Madame de Montespan, although of too distinguished a rank to have become so through dread of her influence, was Madame, the sister-in-law of the king, and better known as the Princess Henrietta of England, and daughter of the martyred king of that country. This beautiful and highly-gifted Princess was generally supposed to have made the first conquest of the king's affections. It was certain that he had offered her all the public homage of the most devoted lover : and although their respective situations prevented all possibility of a nearer intercourse, the flatterers of Madame had unfortunately persuaded her that the sentiments of admiration entertained by his Majesty would preserve him from the dominion of any other attachment. Circumstances soon led to a different conclusion : he became enamoured of the diffident and obscure Mademoiselle de la Vallière, one of her maids of honour ; and with the hasty

indiscretion of her sex, she revenged herself, not on those by whose adulation she had been misled—not on him by whose desertion she had been irritated—but on the unoffending object of his new attachment. To princes the task of insult is dangerously easy. Coldness—an averted eye—an inattentive ear—a thousand trifles ‘light as air,’ become in their hands so many envenomed weapons: and all these, and even overt acts of persecution, did she lavish upon the timid girl whose place in her household rendered her a ready prey to her hatred. It is universally believed that the line of conduct pursued by Madame and her ill-advisers on this occasion, stimulated the king to bestow the title of Duchess on their victim; which, by giving her a distinct rank at court, at once elevated her above their reach.

But Madame united to all this violence and indiscretion, the frankness and generosity of her national character. She had been actuated by the jealousy of a spoiled beauty, who had found herself suddenly deprived of the absolute sovereignty

over the first sovereign in Europe ; and when she saw her rival in turn abandoned and humiliated, she was warm in her defence and support. Though she had scorned, in Madame de la Vallière, the declared and triumphant mistress of the king, she flew, like a ministering angel, to the Hôtel de Biron in that hour of desertion,

When interest calls off all her sneaking train,
And all the obliged desert, and all the vain,

and was equally prompt to sustain and soothe its unhappy mistress, and to oppose the advancement and insolence of the new favorite.

Madame had been prevented by indisposition from being present at the scene I have described to you ; but the next day it had become the very fable of the court ; and I was not a little surprised when, on accompanying my father to a *festin* given at St. Cloud on the following night, I was accosted by her royal highness as the “ Squire of Dames ”—presented by her to all those of her intimate society with whom I chanced

to be unacquainted,—and finally honoured with her hand in the dance.

“ I have been long in doubt,” said she, as I led her through a gallery to the ball-room, “ whom to select as my chevalier at the approaching *carrousel*. I wish to avoid the ungracious task of a preference among many pretendants ; and I cannot better determine my choice, than by the honourable boldness you exhibited last night in support of a lovely and much-abused woman. You have commenced your career by an innovation, and by a daring contempt of vulgar prejudice and subjection. It was a parlous venture, when you consider the throng of dirty sycophants to whom your deed bore defiance and accusation. But—*passé pour cela*—although you are *le preux par excellence, Monsieur le Marquis*, may I venture to inquire whether you have the other and more ordinary qualifications of a gallant knight ? I understand you are but recently returned from Italy : surely you have not there neglected the fitting graces of an accomplished

cavaliere;—are you an expert swordsman—a good horseman ?”—I gave as modest an account of my abilities as I dared ; for I was alarmed at the prospect of being invested with an honour equally dangerous from the indignation of disappointed aspirants, and painful from my own peculiar situation. “ You will consider yourself engaged to wear my colours,” said the Princess, as I respectfully took my leave. “ Come to me to-morrow morning, and we will arrange, with the assistance of Mademoiselle de Scudéry, some gallant device for your bearing.”

I could not fail to be gratified by so flattering a distinction on the part of one of the loveliest, and perhaps the most attractive woman adorning the court of Louis ; second in rank to the Queen alone, and having long commanded the affection of his Majesty, by whom she was still regarded with the tenderest esteem. But if I failed in duly appreciating the honours of my situation, the vehement congratulations of my father and mother would have made me more than sufficiently sensi-

ble of its value. The Duchess in particular predicted my certain victory, and consequent favour, and evidently grounded my future fortunes on the basis of a gaudy pageant. I know not, however, what glory she could anticipate, unless the idle exhibition of my showy person; or unless she trusted to see me become that degraded puppet, the minion lover of a powerful princess.

It is certain, however, that even Louis was at that time greatly influenced by external show in the selection of his favorites. A gallant bearing, a profuse style of living, a romantic turn of character, and even a fine figure, were sufficient passports to his good opinion; as the rapid elevation of his most distinguished favorite, Lauzun, is a convincing proof. None, too, but those who have endured, and cursed, the monotony of the precincts of a court, can properly estimate the value of a new arrival, especially if affording any promise of originality. A court is as a petty island, adjoining a mighty continent, where every sail is cheered, from the promise of novelty, into

its dull and isolated port. The Duchesse de L—— calculated, more justly than myself, my value as a stranger to Versailles; and that value, once stamped into currency by the favor of Madame Henriette, I found myself, according to her prediction, surrounded by friends and admirers.

The appointed day of the *carrousel* arrived. The quadrille to which I belonged was composed of his Majesty, habited as Francis the First, and gracefully becoming the character of that romantic monarch; the Marquis de Vardes, as the “Chevalier sans peur et sans reproche;” Lauzun, as the Maréchal de Bellegarde; and myself, as the illustrious Gaston de Foix, my splendid suit enriched with all the jewels of my mother’s *écrin*. The king himself wore on this occasion all the crown diamonds; and was hailed, as he rode forwards from the Louvre to the lists, by the shouts of an assembled multitude, who delighted to see realized the splendour of one of their most brilliant national epochs. We were preceded by pages carrying our shields, mine being adorned

with the device of a golden lily—the motto “*Mon Dieu, mon Roi, ma dame.*” A blue scarf, embroidered by Madame, graced my shoulder ; and, thus accoutred, I formed indeed a worthy representative of the true and loyal knight of chivalry—falsehood in every thought and every gesture ; and wearing the cognizance of one who was less than nothing to my heart. But as I looked around on the galleries whence our achievements were witnessed and applauded by the whole court, as well as by the principal families of Paris,—inspired by the gaiety and romantic splendour of the scene, my whole thoughts and hopes centred in the desire of victory : and they were not disappointed. I had the fortune—good or evil—to unhorse the king himself. Had I been older in my days of courtiership, I had perhaps been more discreet and less successful ; but wearing, as he did on this occasion, the colours and cognizance of Madame de Montespan, I knew that my victory would be a triumph in the eyes of Madame ; and my vanity was perhaps too intensely gratified as

I knelt before her to receive the prize at her hands.

From that day I became involved in all the intrigues and discontents of the court of St. Cloud; and had I been free to enjoy the mere diversions of society, I might perhaps have congratulated myself on the chance which had established me there. Without possessing the ceremonious dulness of the royal *salon*—the violation of decorum exhibited in that of the married concubine of the king—or the pedantry of the Hôtel de Richelieu—the familiar circle of Madame was at once dignified, sprightly, and literary. Among the men, there were the graceful Comte de Guiche, the witty Roquelaure, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, that profound and original cynic; the poet Benserade, Bussy Rabutin, the satirist—Grammont and Lauzun, those heroes of romance: while, among the ladies received at St. Cloud, were Mesdames de Fayette de Brègy, de Sevigné, Mademoiselle de Scudéry; and, in addition to these, others equally distinguished by

their illustrious rank. Even divested of all the *prestige* of royalty, Madame would still have been the leading star of this brilliant assemblage. She possessed a playful, but original turn of mind, which could adorn even the most ordinary and exhausted topics of discourse; and although, perhaps, more satirical and more engagingly frank than became one of so exalted a rank, she had a grace of address, and a generous warmth of heart, which healed the transient wounds caused by her indiscretion of speech. Had she, however, been more lovely, more captivating—had my heart been even estranged from my beloved Armina,—Henrietta of England would never have obtained that passionate influence over my feelings which she was generally supposed to exercise. She had already loved!—not the husband to whom, for state purposes, she had been unwillingly united at the altar,—but of her own free will, she had already bestowed her affections on the accomplished Comte de Guiche. I would not, Gustave, exchange the wildest flower that ever

blossomed on heath or mountain, for the fairest rose of the garden if it hath been already culled and worn on the bosom of another !

But whatever share my heart, or that of her royal highness, might have in our confirmed and increasing friendship, it was one that threatened me with danger. Sometimes, indeed, I trusted, with romantic enthusiasm, that when the hour of discovery should arrive, I might profit by the influence of Madame over the mind of Louis :— but noble and candid indeed must she have been, since I ventured to hope that she would forgive the assumed devotion with which her favour had been received, and the reserve I had practised towards her. With the habitual inertia of a feeble character, I waited till circumstances should direct my future conduct, when a most perplexing incident arose, to increase my difficulties.

A secret mission was projected between the courts of Versailles and St. James's. It was the policy of Louis to detach the interests of England

and Holland; and the management of this delicate and important object he confidentially intrusted to Madame, relying on her influence over her brother, Charles the Second, by whom she was fondly beloved, to effect his purpose.

It was arranged that her royal highness should make a voyage to England for this purpose; and should receive an audience from the king at Canterbury: while it was also settled, that in order to conceal the motive of her journey, she should be accompanied as far as Amiens by Louis himself, and by the whole court; who were thence to proceed towards Lisle, Dunkirk, and the recent conquests in Flanders. In the formation of the retinue destined to accompany Madame on so important an occasion, it was rumoured that the appointment of *chevalier d'honneur* had been conferred, at the solicitation of my father, upon myself; and this accursed mission was to be undertaken on the very week which I had solemnly and repeatedly promised to devote to the protection and solace of the
ed Armina!

For once I pursued a manly and honourable course; and relying absolutely on the generosity of Madame, I hastened to St. Cloud, threw myself at her feet, and acquainted her with all the perplexities of my situation. She listened with patience, and even with interest, to my recital; but not, I must confess, without some womanly expressions of surprise and resentment. When I had concluded my story, she rose, and approaching the window, she threw it open, and leant there some minutes in silence. At length returning towards me, as though some better feeling had triumphed over the first angry suggestion of her indignation,—she said with distinct firmness, “ You have honoured me, Marquis, by your reliance on the rectitude of my character—rise, Sir—I will not disavow your trust. If you have misled me heretofore by professions of an assumed devotion,—if you have sought to acquire my favour by an hypocritical pretence of undivided homage,—be the disgrace,—the self-convicted falsehood *yours* to lament and atone;—

but Henrietta will forbear to add one merited reproach to your present difficulties. To-night, I shall have the honour of requesting from his Majesty a fresh nomination to the place you reject ; and this I can easily effect without compromising your secret or your honour. You have been my friend," she continued in a more subdued tone ; "and it is not the office of friendship to desert the unhappy or the erring. On my return from England a fortnight hence, meet me here ; and we will consult together on the best mode of making this degrading affair known to your family. It is not impossible that their interest and my own may finally obtain the sanction of his Majesty.—You have indeed grieved—you have disappointed me ;—but let that pass—and remember, that the promise I now make you of friendship and protection, is free, and sacred."

For worlds could I not have offered one grateful expression to my generous protectress ; but as I respectfully departed from her presence, my whole heart was touched with a sense of her

forbearance which defied all power of expression. I knew and appreciated the delicacy of her allusions; and I would have rendered up my life to prove to her the warmth of my gratitude.

I need not tell you, Gustave, that the object of his Majesty was fully answered; and in returning from England with the treaty already signed, her Royal Highness was enabled to offer to the king a highly gratifying token of loyalty and affection. She appeared, indeed, to have reached the zenith of her popularity and fortune. Young—beautiful—powerful—beloved—rich in the confidence and regard of all around her, Henrietta might have been cited as a rare example of prosperity. But while the stately tree flourished, the pride of the forest in beauty, and luxuriance,—the axe of the spoiler was busy at its root.

One morning, when I had been occupied at St. Mandé, in preparing, by the desire of Madame, a memorial relating to my peculiar situation, which she purposed presenting to the king, I

was met, on my road towards Paris, by the Duc de Liancourt, who accosted me in great agitation. "In God's name," he exclaimed, "why are you loitering here? She has asked for you repeatedly, and, unless your horse will carry you to St. Cloud in fifteen minutes, you will be too late!—Or will you take mine?—but do not pause."—"Of whom, of what are you speaking?" I replied with astonishment.

"Can it be," replied Liancourt, "that you are still ignorant of the sudden and hopeless illness of Madame?"

"Impossible—I left her but yesterday at noon, in the most perfect health—"

"She has, however, received the last sacraments—the king is by her side—Bossuet is offering the consolations of religion,—and I fear she may have already breathed her last.—She has asked for you repeatedly, as though she had something of importance to communicate.—Several messengers have sought you at Paris, for it occurred to your friends that there might be

letters—papers—in short, my dear Marquis, if there are any documents in the possession of Madame, likely to injure you—hasten, if it be not too late, to secure them.”

I saw to what his mistaken kindness pointed—I knew the suspicions that had, from the first, attached themselves to my connexion with her Royal Highness,—but I had nothing to dread from the inspection of her papers. Besides, had death and disgrace awaited me on that side, I had no power—no presence of mind to have extricated myself.—I was smitten with despair!—God be my witness that it was not arising from any selfish consideration, although a fatality seemed, indeed, to confirm the difficulties of my own position.—No—it was the dying figure of Henrietta which took possession of my mind—her rank—her station—existed for me no longer ;—it was my beloved—my true friend, who was stretched on her bed of death! I reeled on my horse, and had it not been for the assistance of Liancourt, I should never have reached St. Cloud.

With difficulty I mounted the great staircase.— In the *salle des gardes*, we learned that the princess yet lived ; and on reaching the antechamber to her apartment, I heard the voice of Bossuet, deep—measured—awful—exhorting the dying Christian. My wild and haggard looks painfully attracted towards me the notice of the numerous members of the court, there assembled ;—in the chamber of death, the royal family and the household of Madame alone presumed to penetrate. Hurried on by an irresistible impulse, I rushed forward.—Alas ! it was but to catch a transient view of her pale and inanimate countenance—she had already ceased to exist.

I will not attempt to describe my feelings upon this trying occasion. It was fortunate for me that the universal affliction around me prevented any particular observation of my agonizing sorrow. Death, amid the haunts of splendour and levity, wears a more imposing, a more terrible aspect than in the humbler paths of life. Scarcely were the sounds of song and of dance hushed in

that gorgeous palace, when the awful approach of his footsteps was heard along its galleries. The flowers were scarcely withered that had been yesterday twined in the hair of the princess, and she was already a shrouded corse ;—and I, Gustave !—I, who loved her with the tenderest affection, was forced, by my recent appointment in her household, to assist in watching over her body till it was consigned to the dust—to superintend every ceremony, every vain form which exposed me to the vulgar approach of hireling attendants—I saw Henrietta laid in her coffin—lowered into her grave.—It was all a complication of suffering—a public exposure of the fondest emotions of the heart !

I had also the aggravated distress of learning from the Duchesse de L——, that the ladies in immediate attendance on the departed princess had traced, or imagined they had traced, the origin of her illness to our interview previous to her embarkation for England. As that interview had been fraught with mystery to them,

they chose to invest it with undue importance; and her malady, which was purely physical, and absolutely incurable, was idly attributed to my influence. Yes—they dared to say it—that she had loved me—and that infidelity on my part had hastened her end.

CHAPTER VI.

“ When I remember all
The friends so link'd together
I've seen around me fall,
Like leaves in wintry weather ;—
I feel like one who treads alone
Some banquet hall, deserted—
Whose lights are fled, whose garlands dead—
And all but him departed ! ”

THOMAS MOORE.

“ THE five weeks succeeding this lamented event, I passed without intermission at St. Mandé. For once, the forms of society favoured my feelings; and while it was judged delicate and well-advised by my father and mother that I should retire to the seclusion of the Chateau de L—— for a given period after the death of Madame, I was deriving, in the society of my wife and children, the truest and purest consolation for the loss of my bene-

factress. But those peaceful days passed away too rapidly ; and, for my curse, I was once more summoned to Versailles.

It unfortunately chanced that, on the very evening of my arrival, having no immediate duty to compel my attendance on his Majesty, I repaired to the apartment of my intimate acquaintance the Marquis de Vardes, where I found assembled several of our mutual associates, still indulging in the excesses of the table. They had already drunk deeply, and were amusing themselves with that kind of idle bravado, and wild license of conversation, which is the usual accompaniment of such orgies. The common boasts of drunkenness—success in arms—and success in love—succeeded each other ; when the comparative merits of two celebrated female dancers being under discussion, with all the freedom which the licentiousness of their private character admitted, I chanced to differ in opinion from the Vicomte d'Alincourt, one of the most dissipated of the party, who exclaimed with taunting irony—"Aye,

Marquis, you are no doubt a more exquisite connoisseur in beauty than so unpractised an individual as myself; but what will you wager that I produce not before Vespers to-morrow six peerless damsels who will win the palm, not only from *la Begarra*, but from the peerless *Armina de Gêrilly* herself?

I started with equal surprise and indignation, to hear that holy name profaned by this light mention; and rising haughtily, I replied; "I command you, Sir, to desist from hereafter naming that lady in such terms, and in such society." "Good," replied d'Alincourt, scornfully, "good—*Chevalier courtois et sensible!*—It fits you indeed, to be so chivalrous in defence of a damsel whose romantic billets you treat with the signal respect of leaving them open to the inquisition of every idle usher, and babbling valet de chambre in the palace."

As he spoke, he produced two lines, addressed to me by the name of Armand only, containing an appointment, and signed, according to her na-

tional custom, with her maiden name. Enraged that the terms of endearment it contained should thus become a public jest, I exclaimed, "And by what right, dishonourable as you are, have you presumed to peruse the letter of another?"

"You must observe," replied d'Alincourt, with cool and bitter contempt, "that the envelope of this passionate invocation is lost, and was even missing when I first discovered the mysterious treasure in the Orangerie. The name of Armand alone suggested the probability that the hero of so tender an attachment could be none other than the *Oroondates* of the day, the gallant Marquis de L——! Thus far, in reply to your inquiry. To me, Sir, an explanation is due in return; which, as it relates to the awkward word, 'dishonourable,' as you were but now pleased to apply it, must be immediate and satisfactory."

Irritated by his insolence, I rather increased than diminished the measure of his provocation by my reply; and the obvious consequence was a

challenge, and an arrangement for our meeting within forty-eight hours. The necessity for d'Alincourt's attendance on Monsieur, to whom he was equerry, prevented a more instant termination of the affair; indeed, being each the heir of a family of importance, and having business of moment to adjust, some delay was requisite previous to a meeting, from which the severity of the language that had passed between us, rendered it impossible that both should return alive.

And now, what a conflict of anger, of shame, of repentance, awaited me on my return to solitary reflection! In a few hours, my wife might become a helpless and persecuted widow in a foreign land—my children fatherless—the legitimacy of their birth disputed by my own childless and bereft parents. I turned sickening from the prospect; but the exigency of the case admitted no delay. I had long and painful disclosures to make to my mother.—The morrow—it might be my last—I promised myself to pass with Armina, still scarcely recovered from her

second confinement ; and the succeeding morning, at break of day, was appointed for the fatal meeting.

I had no doubt of obtaining an audience, even at that late hour of the night, from the Duchesse de L——, whose duties as *première Dame d'atours* to the Queen, usually detained her long after midnight ; and whose habits inclined her to employ the hours of silence and repose in the formation and prosecution of her political plans, rather than in sleep. Having obtained permission to wait upon my mother, I entered her dressing-room, and implored her, in Italian, to dismiss her women. The Duchesse was seated, Gustave, at her writing table,—the scene even now appears present before my eyes,—habited only in a long white wrapper, while the jewels which she had worn at the reception of the evening still glittered in her ears and hair. There was no light in the room, save from the lofty tapers standing on the table between us.

At any other time, how painful, how difficult

would it have been to me to have entered upon the history I was about to unfold ! but now—the value of time appeared too immense that I should waste it in idle circumlocution ; and the measured beat of the pendulum near me, seemed to whisper that my very moments were numbered. Without further preamble, then, than an appeal to the tenderness of my mother, and the exaction of a solemn promise of secrecy, I commenced my narration. I considered that the most affecting plea by which I could pre-engage the Duchesse to a favourable hearing was the intelligence of my present precarious situation. I knew that the loftiness of her mind, and her high sense of family honour, would be sufficient, even without the solemn oath she had pronounced, to prevent her from drawing upon us judicial interference. Having thus inclined her to consider with leniency the errors of a son, whom a few short hours might place beyond her power to pardon or recall,—I recounted with due minuteness the origin and nature of my connexion with Armina—the

birth of my two boys—and my intention to substantiate and legalize my marriage by every means in my power. To this effect, I implored her intercession with my father; humbly beseeching her to meet me with him the following night at Paris, for the purpose of signing the necessary documents in favour of my unfortunate children, whose innocent beauty I fondly described to her as a natural claim upon her mercy and tenderness.

During the course of my relation, I had no means of observing the effect it produced upon my auditress; for, with the address of habitual cunning, she had removed the lights to a distance; and I could only judge of her eager impatience for the material points of my confession, by the involuntary gesture of throwing back her hair from her forehead with unconscious vehemence. She heard my tale to the end without interruption—without one natural burst of angry invective, without one womanly effusion of tenderness, or indignation; and when she spoke at length, her

voice was measured and unbroken. But was this calmness the effect of maternal partiality, soothing over my faults—palliating my detected falsehood? Was it the resignation of a mind subdued by the danger and last anxieties of an only son? No! it was the malevolent stillness of the reptile of prey, waiting the happiest hour to wind its deathful coil around an unsuspecting victim—it was the peaceful shadow of the upas tree, inviting the repose of the passenger, while its poison is secretly distilling for his perdition.

With the calmness of despair I paused for her reply. It was eloquent and dignified, as became the most finished inmate of the Court;—it was cold and artful as if Hell's chief agent had been the minister of her intentions. But while she spoke, her voice became gradually so low and intense, that I trembled as I listened. "On my conduct," she said, "towards my father and herself, it was now too late to offer any comment; my duel with Monsieur d'Alincourt appeared irremediable; and the great probability of its

fatal termination rendered my confession equally flattering to her, as my confidante, and equally disinterested in itself. The steps, however, which I had pointed out for the benefit of my children should be immediately taken ; and she counselled me to pass the following day, without further comment, with my family. “ I charge myself,” continued the Duchess, “ with the well-being of your wife and children ; as well as with the task of developing to the former the full measure of your honorable dealings towards her and hers. At eight o’clock to-morrow evening, meet me with your notaries at the Hotel de L—— ; till then,” added she, rising and ringing her bell for her attendants, “ peace be with you.”

Humiliated and deeply wounded by the inhuman coldness of my mother, I had still before me the dreadful task of passing the day with assumed indifference in the company of my wife. Yet how to assume indifference ? when the tenderness of my welcome at St. Mandé, my manifest importance to the happiness of all its inmates, struck

me at once to the very soul, and overcame all my firmness. Every trifling circumstance affected me with new feelings. The *bouquet*, prepared by my boy—the repast, so delicately assorted to my fancy by my devoted Armina, whose loveliness was rendered at that moment doubly feminine by the recent perils of child-bed—all now appeared to offer reproaches for my neglect. The half finished portrait on the easel, would, I knew, never exhibit its completion to my sight; the air which Armina had composed to beguile the long hours of my absence, and which I felt she might soon require as a never-ceasing consolation—all conspired to remind me how much I was beloved—how deeply I had injured—and how great was the extent of affliction which awaited my unconscious wife.

At length that dreadful day closed—the shadows of evening came on—and already I moved to be gone. “You will not surely away to night,” whispered Armina, throwing herself on my bosom; “this has been so peaceful—so happy a day amongst us! You are low in spirits, Armand;

yet God alone knows why you should be in sorrow—loved and blessed as you are!—Tarry with me, yet a while, my beloved—and all will be well! Who—who can soothe your unknown affliction like Armina? who can serve you so carefully—or pillow your head so tenderly? Come back then,” continued she smiling, and again drawing me towards the house; “come back, truant bird—or the ark shall be closed for ever against your wandering wings.”

She saw, however, by the earnestness of my countenance, that I was in no mood for trifling; I strained her to my heart—and implored the blessings of the God of all goodness upon her.—I returned to the house—but it was only to lift my babes once more from their common cradle; to imprint my last kiss upon their foreheads;—then, placing them in their mother’s arms, and again and again mingling my embraces with earnest blessings, I rushed from their presence!—Gustave—I never again beheld, or that beloved wife—or those innocent children!

With the restlessness of an unquiet spirit, I urged my horse to its utmost speed, nor ever paused, till I reached a winding of the road, where I knew that the home which contained my treasures would be hidden for ever from my view. It was now a dark, starless night—and the only light in the valley glimmered in the dwelling of Armina. Fervently I uttered my last prayer for her well-being, and attempted to resume my route; but as I advanced, a hand seized my bridle-rein, and a voice exclaimed—"Stop—Monsieur le Marquis—I arrest you in the name of the king." Suspecting at first some error, I announced myself; but I soon found that the lieutenant of police, to whom I was required to surrender my sword, was only too officially correct. In less than ten minutes, and without further explanation, I was placed in a close travelling carriage, accompanied by an officer of the guard, and a favorite valet-de-chambre of my father assisted me into the carriage, which was, I perceived, escorted by two cavalry guards.

It was twelve hours before I was permitted to pause on my journey to obtain refreshment. As soon as indignation and astonishment would permit me to question my companion, I learned that, by some unaccountable indiscretion, the rumour of my intended duel with the Viscomte d'Alincourt had reached the ear of his Majesty, who even at that early period of his reign, began to manifest extreme displeasure, and punish with great severity all meetings of this description.

His Majesty had been particularly irritated in the present instance from the circumstance of the quarrel and challenge having originated in a drunken broil, within the very precincts of his palace, in open defiance of his well-known will; and he had evinced his displeasure by exiling d'Alincourt, for the space of twelve months to come, to his father's estate in Languedoc; while the noted influence of my family had procured for myself the far milder sentence of immediately joining the army in the Netherlands.

My commission, which I now received from the hands of the attendant officer, bore the express condition, that I should not, upon any pretext, absent myself more than two leagues from my regiment during the present campaign; and at the inn where we paused for an hour's repose, Lemaitre, the valet to whom I before alluded, privately delivered to me a billet from my mother; acquainting me that, having been informed by his Majesty of the displeasure with which he intended to visit upon me my open defiance of his wishes and authority, she had employed her most urgent solicitations in my favor, and had obtained the actual amelioration of my sentence, as well as permission that I should be accompanied in my exile by a confidential servant of my family.

"I have not yet ventured," continued the letter, "to add to your father's affliction upon the present occasion by a disclosure of those facts which you recently confided to me; but you may trust that I shall select a favorable and early

opportunity to this effect. In the mean time, I will myself wait upon Mademoiselle de G rilly, and soften as much as possible the first tidings of your exile. By degrees I will unfold the whole truth of your position; and during your absence, I undertake to watch over both her and her children, with the most vigilant anxiety for their welfare. Be not, therefore, uneasy on their account. The present circumstances, untoward as they appear, may be eventually the means of reconciling all parties, and bringing your affairs to a fortunate conclusion. Remember, therefore, that your immediate duty to your family, as well as to the name you bear, consists in the application of every power of your mind and body to the profession in which his Majesty has been pleased to engage you.—You are a Frenchman! I need not therefore recommend to your devotion the cause of your country; but I may at least remind you, that this is the first occasion which has afforded you the power of distinguishing yourself by your own exertions; and that no

circumstance is so calculated to soften the feelings of your father and myself towards the object who engrosses your affection, as the distinctions which may crown your success in the present campaign."

She concluded by recommending me the utmost caution in the correspondence I should despatch from the camp; all the government couriers being subject to the power of the police and ministerial inquisition. She therefore advised me to commit every letter of moment to Lemaitre, or some other confidential messenger. She also inclosed me letters of recommendation to many officers of distinction serving with the army of the Maréchal de Villars.

Re-assured by the perusal of this letter, I began to look upon the aspect of my affairs with a less desponding consideration. I was satisfied that the campaign would afford me sufficient occasions for proving my personal bravery; and I was therefore content to relinquish my meeting with d'Alincourt—a young man for whom I had

formerly entertained a particular predilection, and whose haughty and irritating language in our recent dispute arose, as I well knew, solely from the effects of intoxication. I was equally satisfied to be spared the task of undeceiving my poor deluded Armina; and that she and my children should become known to my family under circumstances so calculated to create pity and commiseration. I was more than all content that circumstances had enabled me to indulge the inclination I had long experienced to break through my habits of indolence, and serve in the army of Villars. I resolved, that the prudence of my conduct, and my strict attention to soldierly discipline, should work my way to the pardon of my king—in short, my sanguine temper already anticipated a favourable termination of all my difficulties.

My audience of introduction to the Maréchal confirmed these buoyant hopes. By my appointment to the distinguished regiment of B —, the Maréchal easily comprehended that the offence

which had drawn upon me the peculiar restrictions attached to my commission, was of no very enormous quality. He received me, therefore, rather as became my birth, than my present situation ; and without once alluding to the private letter of Royal instructions which I had been required to deliver, he politely, and even kindly, congratulated me on my appointment ; reminded me that my father and himself were ancient *camarades d'armes* ; and politely presented me to the officers of his personal staff.

Among the splendid group assembled in the tent of the Maréchal de Villars, I recognized many of my intimate acquaintances and friends ; and receiving the welcome usually bestowed on the new comer, who brings the latest intelligence from Paris, and therefore relieves for a moment the monotony of the camp, I was soon at my ease—soon contented—soon interested in the novelty of the objects around me ; and at length began to congratulate myself on my unexpected good fortune.

It is not now, Gustave, the moment to trouble you with details of that well-known campaign, nor will I touch upon the subject further than is necessary for the explanation of my private concerns. About three weeks after my arrival at head-quarters, I received a long communication from the Duchesse de L——. “I should have written earlier,” she said, “had I other than unpleasant intelligence to communicate. But be satisfied, my dear son, that although you have been visited by a painful loss, it might have reached you in a far more afflicting channel. Your infant son is no more ! but when I add that your Armina, and her first born, are well, I trust you will receive this dispensation as becomes you. The day succeeding your departure, I waited upon Mademoiselle de G rilly ; and our long explanation was mutually painful.—Armina and your mother now understand each other ;—she lives under my protection, and it is to me she turns for support in this trying moment. Yes ! my son ;—all will be well.—You must attribute

her silence not only to her present affliction, but to her dread lest the contagion of her child's disorder,—the small-pox,—should be conveyed in her letter. You must not, therefore, expect to hear from *herself* for some weeks to come, as only two days have elapsed since the interment of the poor infant. I must again recommend you to despatch Lemaitre to Paris with your letters to us."

Following implicitly the counsels of my altered mother, I immediately despatched my own courier with an humble letter of explanation and condolence to my beloved wife. He did not return for three weeks ; and his excuse for this unexpected delay was more calculated to excite alarm, than to satisfy my anxiety. He informed me,—for at the request of the Duchess he had been already admitted into our confidence,—that Mademoiselle de G rilly, as it seemed my mother's studied pleasure to term Armina, had been attacked by the small-pox a few days after the death of her child ; and that he had remained in Paris till the

physicians pronounced that the dangerous crisis of her horrible disorder was past ; that from her extreme debility, the Duchess could not yet venture to remit any packet to her hands ; and that she was about to quit Paris for change of air.

On receiving the cruel intelligence of Armina's danger, I became for the first time sensible of the severity of the sentence inflicted upon me. What would I not have sacrificed to visit her but for one short hour, and to have solaced her present heavy affliction ! But I knew that the strict *surveillance* under which I was placed, would immediately betray me to detection ; and that my absence at such a moment might prove finally and fatally ruinous to my prospects ; and I was therefore forced to a patient submission. It was at least consolatory to my feelings to learn from Lemaitre, that the most cordial affection already subsisted between the Duchess de L—— and the two objects dearest to my heart. Accomplished hypocrite that he was ! by what minute and ac-

cursed re-assurances did he deceive me into composure and satisfaction !

It was now two months since I had joined the army ; and another elapsed before I had an opportunity of again receiving private letters from Paris. It was still my mother who wrote ; first in the name of Armina, and lastly in her own ; and I had the deep affliction of learning that although the small-pox had left no external blemish on the beauty of my lovely wife, the disorder, as is not unusually the case, had settled in her eyes ; and she was therefore obliged to undergo the deprivation of writing to me with her own hand. “ She was otherwise,” she said, “ well and happy.” My mother added, that the most skillful surgeons had little hope of Armina’s retaining her sight.

Grievous as were these tidings, I had little leisure to lament them ; in a few days was fought that decisive battle, in which I had the misfortune to lose my liberty at the moment of receiving the wound over my temple, from the effects of which

you have so frequently seen me suffer. For many weeks I was insensible to my unfortunate situation ; and I recovered to perceive that, through the attention of the officer by whom I had been made prisoner, the attendance of my own servant had been secured to me, as well as the care of the principal staff-surgeon of the army. To his skill and patient humanity I am indebted for my preservation ; and as soon as the fortune of war would permit, he despatched to my family a statement of my situation. It was long before I was equal to the perusal of the letters I received by the return of the courier. Those of Armina appeared to me to be colder and less animated than our mutual tenderness entitled me to expect ; but I attributed my first impulse of disappointment on this occasion to my feverish and excited tone of mind. The next letter, however, which I received from her, was still colder, and still shorter. I began to be intensely uneasy—vague suspicions crossed my mind. Lemaitre refused to leave me, on parole, during my yet imperfect re-

covery; and I had, therefore, no means of ascertaining their justice, or of procuring certain intelligence of her present habits. Armina was becoming indifferent—perhaps unfaithful—and I—I—to whom even a bare suspicion of that nature was madness—I was a wounded prisoner, in a distant country, and debarred at once by my captivity and enfeebled condition from defending my rights.

For months I lingered in an agonizing state of suspense; at length, one morning as I was slowly pacing my apartment with every thought and every feeling fondly turned towards the loved ones of my heart, a packet was delivered to me by the especial favour of the General-in-Chief, with the seal unbroken. It was a letter from my mother, inclosing the following lines in the long-lost handwriting of my Armina.

“Yea! for the last time, and but to express to thee in all Christian forgiveness, my pardon for thy dealings towards me and mine,—I address thee, Armand! I address thee but to tell thee

that hereafter our paths are appointed where never again my credulity shall be encountered by thy deceit,—mine affection by thy bitter cruelty ! Heretofore, I have been accountable to my God, and unto thee ; but now I am about to become *His* only, from whose fold I strayed but for my sin and sorrow ! And may mine earliest conversion atone for the errors of both !

“ Since the first happy moment in which I determined to seek the repose of a cloister,—the only repose which may now avail me,—I have at times wished to return to my native country, and seek my resting-place within the walls of Rome ; but I have remembered that the land which contains the graves of my lost children, is also more than mine ; and that in professing myself in a convent of thine own proud city, I may trust, that even *thou*, Armand, wilt some times pass the dwelling where my last bitter moments are expiating mine unintended crime.

“ Oh ! Armand—farewell !—Thou, to whose care I was bequeathed by my dying father—thou,

to whose professed affection mine unguarded heart betrayed me—thou, against whose love the claims of country and kindred availed as nothing—fare thee well! Pardon and peace be with thee.”

I will not describe the mingled astonishment and despair which assailed me on the perusal of this letter. Yes! all was over—Armina was lost to me for ever! The end of all my exertions—the aim of all my endurance—was at once wrested from my hopes!

All before me was a vast, a dark abyss, where no resting-place offered relief to my weary heart—no refuge was prepared for my desolation. “The *graves* of my children?” I was then doubly bereft—not even my child remained to console me!

But abruptly as this intelligence had been communicated, and sudden as was the alteration in the style and tone of my lost wife, I had reason to believe that previous letters had been intercepted, and I had only the chance of war

to revile for my total want of preparation for the stroke. I learned from my mother's tardy communication, that Armina, since the death of her children, and my own captivity, had become depressed and estranged in mind to the most alarming degree. Her devotion had assumed a severe and mystic turn; and her confidence in her confessor had led her to seek his counsel only, in the important step she meditated. As no lawful marriage had taken place between us, it would have been impossible for my family to oppose any legal obstacle to her intentions; and in order to escape the tender entreaties and representations of the Duchesse de L——, Armina had already, and without previous warning to any, taken the veil in the convent of *La Retraite Chrétienne*; the only one in Paris which dispenses with the year of noviciate. Thus, every glimpse of hope was lost to me for ever; and it will not surprise you to learn that the intensity of my affliction occasioned a severe fever—that in my delirium I raved unceasingly of my lost

wife, of my dead children—and that when, by the mercy of Providence, I was rescued from my peril, and restored to consciousness, I was still too deeply, too cruelly depressed, to derive any satisfaction from the knowledge that an exchange of prisoners had been effected, that my season of exile had expired, and that I was once more free to return to Paris.

CHAPTER VII.

“ The better days of life were ours,
The worst can be but mine ;—
The pain that wrings—the storm that lowers,
Can never more be thine.”—BYRON.

I DID indeed return to Paris ;—without one hope to incite my exhausted heart—without one wish to rouse my mind by the renewed pain of disappointment. All was well with me—for all was indifferent !

In my worn and harassed state of mind, I confess that the fervour of my mother’s reception appeared to me artificial and overstrained ; I could scarcely believe in the excess of sympathy she displayed. Yet why should she dissemble ? I felt that my suspicions were uncharitable ; and the sense of having been unjust towards her, rendered me more than ever grateful, tender, and

respectful. Great God ! if in our after-state of existence, it were decreed that our souls should retain any portion of the feelings which animated them during their imprisonment in weeds of flesh,—with what sensations of loathing should we turn from many to whom we were bound by ties of affection during their sojourn on earth. What secrets doth the grave unfold !—what hypocrisy doth it not make manifest !—Yet how many among us pass away their days of life in forming and assuring concealments which may be laid bare to all around them, during the first hour in which they are numbered with the dead. And thus my artful mother—but I must not anticipate my narration.

Between my family and myself, the name of Armina was never, by tacit consent, again mentioned ; nor did any allusion to the past tend to restore impressions, for the sake of each, perhaps, better buried in oblivion. Once, and once only, I was compelled to renew those cruel remembrances. I had gathered together, with the

most exact care, all that remained to me of Geriglio's splendid bequest; and of this I made a secret but legal donation in the form of dowry, to the convent which his daughter had selected as her last abiding place.

It now became the policy of the Duchesse de L——, by soliciting for me an audience of reconciliation with his Majesty, to fix upon me once more the trammels of the Court. I was become too indifferent to offer a lasting opposition to her wishes; and soon, in the vortex of dissipation,—of frivolous, yet unavoidable, occupation in the service of the Dauphin, to whom, shortly after my return, I was appointed *Ménin*, the poignancy of my sorrow daily decreased. The graciousness with which his Majesty was pleased to exaggerate the importance of my services during the late campaign, and, I may add, the personal regard with which he condescended to distinguish me, were not slow to awaken new feelings in my bosom. Ambition and avidity, the vices of middle age, were beginning to assume

that influence over my character which had been hitherto suppressed by the more generous impulses of youthful spirit, and by the predominance of a tender and disinterested affection.

I became a courtier ;—and it was then that I learned to consider the decision of Armina as the most wise and rational step ; and as an act of judicious consideration towards myself, on whom the renewal of our marriage would have entailed certain disgrace, and probably a second exile from Court. I was satisfied that all had been arranged for my advantage ; and once content with this persuasion, I avoided all mention, and, in great measure, banished all recollection of the stormy days of my early youth.

The Duchesse de L—— readily penetrated into this change of sentiment, which, versed as she was in the general frailty of the human character, and the peculiar instability of mine, she had probably anticipated in the first instance. She now began to hint the eligibility of a second marriage. The daughter of the Maréchal de Viry was no more ;

but among the maids of honour of the Dauphiness, there was one equally gifted with those charms which alone prevailed in the estimation of my family,—those of fair estates and rich possessions. An alliance between us was proposed and arranged by our respective connexions;—the favour of the King rendered our nuptials brilliant and honourable;—and thus, in my marriage with your mother, the beautiful Julie D'Humières, her hitherto fair reputation, and her extreme loveliness, were the only considerations overlooked as of trifling import.

Even with yourself, my Gustave, her only son, I will be absolutely candid on this subject. I never loved her: the feelings of my heart were exhausted;—and I neither considered her well-being, nor cultivated her good qualities. My indulgence equally proceeded from indifference; nor was it wonderful that the young heart of

One who had been beguiled—one who was made
Within a loving bosom to be laid,
Blessing—and being blest,—

should at length grow weary of the loneliness to which it had been insultingly condemned.

Our princely establishment admitted of our adopting a mode of life which mutually relieved us of each other's presence ; and while my young wife, in all the pride of precedence which the recent death of my father enabled her to indulge,—glorious as beauty, birth, and high and gratified pretensions could make her,—revelled in all the wantonness of luxury and dissipation, my own time and my own mind were sufficiently occupied by the duties of the important post I already occupied in the administration, to render me regardless and unconscious of all that was passing in my own dwelling. Murmurs and sometimes complaints indeed, reached me ; but these were all from the lips of my mother, who from the period of my marriage had failed in exacting from her daughter-in-law those marks of regard and deference which she expected, and as I then thought, deserved. The young Duchess, disgusted probably by her early experience of court servitude, had already withdrawn herself from St. Germain's, and given in her resignation of the place she held ; and, in

order fully to enjoy the independence secured to her by her fortune and station, she established herself in her hotel at Paris, which, under her direction, became the most splendid of the Parisian palaces. She possessed peculiar talents for adorning and presiding over society; and profiting by the influence of her youth and graceful person, she seemed aspiring to form a rule and court of her own. The effect of such pretensions on public opinion you may yourself, Gustave, determine, by the present unpopularity of the Duchesse du Maine; and your mother had even less justification than that princess for so vain an ambition. The idle—the gallant—and the witty, however, flocked readily to a mansion whence etiquette was banished; and in whose saloons and private theatre the sound of mirth and music hourly prevailed. There was even attraction in the novel spectacle of a young married woman of high rank nightly displaying the abilities and taste of the most finished actress.

My mother, enraged at being thus defied and

eclipsed by the daughter towards whom she had intended to act as guide and mentor, and irritated by a success, the nature of which she considered an outrage to the house of L——, and a still greater insult to the court from which Julie had withdrawn herself, wearied me by representations of the indecency of proceedings so contrary to the *convenances* of high breeding. But I cared not to molest and interfere with the chosen diversions of a woman, over whose actions my estranged heart afforded me so little right to assume the governance. Since the hour of your birth, Gustave, I had scarcely passed one hour in the society of your mother; and readily acquiescing in the desire she manifested to have you reared and educated, in this, our provincial château, I passed all my leisure hours in hurried visits to your cradle, and afterwards to your study.

But notwithstanding my determination to judge with unlimited indulgence the failings of my wife, they soon forced themselves upon my observation in a manner that required interfer-

ence for the sake of my own honour. The information of my mother, and consequent inquiries, induced me to forbid the visits of the Comte de S——, to whom the world had long accused the young Duchess of according a preference. She cheerfully obeyed my commands, however, on this head. But while I was deceiving myself with the belief that all intercourse had ceased between them, and that the mind of Julie was engrossed by other objects, the Comte, experienced in all the arts of seduction, and resolved at all hazards to renew his interviews with the unfortunate object of his passion, had purchased the house adjoining the Hôtel de L——; and had secured a secret and unsuspected entrance into her apartments.

I will not wound the feelings of my son by detailing the detection and disgrace of his mother. It is enough, for my own vindication, to assure him, that her family used their most pressing endeavours to prevail upon me to shut her up for life in a convent; but the

unhappy object of their indignation and vengeance was rescued from their hatred, and the punishment due to her frailty,—by being summoned before a more awful, although, I humbly trust, a more lenient Judge ! She died—unable, with a constitution impaired by vigils and excess, to bear up against the force of that public condemnation she had despised and braved ; or more probably overwhelmed by her own bitter repentance.—Peace be to her memory ! Under better guidance, and cherished by the hand of affection, her failings might have leaned to virtue's side ; and she might have lived to win and wear the honours which accompany old age. As it was, the envy excited by her beauty and enchanting grace only served to render her fall more publicly discussed. You were then, Gustave, happy in the unconsciousness of childhood ; and as the beautiful form now doomed to the corruption of the grave had never leant over your cradle, nor won from you, by her endearments, the first fruits of your infant tenderness, her loss was unnoticed and unfelt.

For me—no change was wrought in my situation. I had entertained no affection to be wounded by her infidelity ;—I had reposed no trust to be broken by her hypocrisy ; and if the dishonour she had brought upon me had roused me to momentary indignation, my anger and my sorrow were alike buried in her grave.

The ruling feelings of my mind had long centred in my service upon, and habitual intercourse with, the king. No man was ever honoured by the friendship of that captivating monarch, without sacrificing, to a suitable return, the warmest devotion of his heart—his time—and personal interests. I have never heretofore made one profession of loyalty ;—I have exhibited no excess of zeal in his service ; I have rather avoided than sought occasions to display my affection, or to profit by that which His Majesty has been frequently pleased to declare publicly towards me. But to you, Gustave, I may, without incurring suspicion, declare, that every impulse of my bosom, every action of my

life, has received its direction from the one prevailing feeling of personal affection towards my sovereign. The best proof I can give you of my sincerity in this assertion is, that I undertook the embassy to Spain, at a moment when the precarious state of my health rendered the exertion extremely dangerous ; that my constitution has been undermined by the sedentary life my ministerial duties have imposed upon me ; and that, far from having profited by my services in a pecuniary point of view, I have expended large sums in the secret service of government, and have been even compelled to sell a part of my unentailed estates to defray the expenses of my diplomacy at Madrid, which I would not distress his Majesty by claiming at his hands.

But I have sacrificed more than my time—more than my fortune or my health. I have relinquished the exquisite pleasure which awaited me in the cultivation of the mind and affection of my only child ; and I should perhaps have remained till now unconscious of the blindness

of my self-devotion, had not recent instances of the innate selfishness and coldness of heart of him for whose love I had ventured all, awakened me from my delusion.

I had ever observed the versatility of the king's affections towards women; I had seen the indifference with which he witnessed the retreat of the lovely La Vallière, who had sacrificed to his passion the purity of a spotless character;—the death of the beautiful Madame de Fontanges, which was accelerated by his fickleness;—and at length the dismissal of the haughty Montespan, who, insolent and unfeeling as she had latterly become, was at an earlier period overcome by sorrow and repentance for the sacrifices prompted by her unlicensed attachment. All these—and more, I had seen caressed as the toys of a moment; and thrown aside with disgust, when the gloss of their first attraction had worn away. The death of his faithful servant and friend, Louvois, had been passed over by the king with suspicious levity;—even the

long imprisonment of Lauzun was a measure scarcely justified by an arrogant degree of presumption which had been solely nursed into being by his Majesty's ill-judged and misplaced familiarity. These circumstances, and many others in which my own feelings have been severely wounded, compel me to forewarn you against the insidious attractions of manners and conversation which may lead you, like myself, to waste the warm affections of your heart where gleams of winter-sunshine will afford no genial and kindly warmth in return. Were it not for the friendship of Madame de Maintenon, who has ever repaid to me the kindness which in her early days of destitution she received from my mother, I am convinced that I should, ere this, have lost even the show of favour with which my services are repaid.

You will, therefore, be no longer surprised that I meditate an early retirement from public life; and happy indeed should I feel, were you content to share my removal from the court.

I have received from Madame de Maintenon, an offer of the place of first lady of the bedchamber to the young Duchesse de Bourgogne, for your future bride; but the alarming levity of that interesting princess,

Whose good and amiable gifts
The sober dignity of virtue wear not,

inclines me to dread so dangerous a companionship. The time may arrive when that which is now accounted but the innocent though frivolous gaiety of an enchanting woman, may become a dangerous and ruinous infliction upon the kingdom itself; and I would not that a daughter of mine should be involved in the calamity. I have avoided all formal engagements with the family of Roche-Guyon, in order that your own inclination may be unfettered even by the interference of his Majesty. We will henceforward dwell together, my Gustave. You shall seek your bride among the numerous families of our own condition, by whom we are surrounded, and she whom you select for your wife shall become my daughter.

You will imagine, perhaps, that I have now concluded the story of my eventful life ; but alas ! there lingers yet behind a detail more painful than any I have unfolded—a page yet unturned, whose gloomy characters are fraught with horror.—I hasten to its recountal, with this only prayer,—that, as a being trusting to receive mercy, I may be merciful in my consideration of the guilt of those, with whom originated the cruel miseries I am about to describe.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ Alas! poor Proteus—thou didst entertain
A wolf, to be the shepherd of thy lambs.”

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

“ IN the occupation of an official life, fatigue and a constant devotion to its duties, allowed me little leisure to indulge in fruitless regrets; and the memory of my Armina became to me like the holy and chastened vision of a youthful dream. If I thought of her, it was as a being

— enskyed and sainted;
By her renouncement, an immortal spirit!—

a being removed above my sympathy, and enjoying upon earth the anticipation of that beatitude, which should hereafter crown her long-enduring penance. Of my departed children, I felt that they had returned, in the loveliness of their inno-

cence, to the bosom of that God from whom their spotless souls emanated ; and there was “ a rapture of repose ” in the love with which I contemplated the mental images of the inspired mother, self-devoted to the service of Heaven, and the cherub spirits of her babes !

There existed none besides my mother who could have entered into my feelings ; but though I sometimes imagined that the slights and insults offered to her by my late wife had led her, at times, to regret the mild and gifted being who might have been unto her as a daughter, yet the subject appeared too sacred for casual mention, and the name of Armina was never pronounced by either.

I need hardly remind you, my dear son, of the peculiar circumstances attending the death of your grandmother. Compelled, by her attendance on the Dauphiness, to follow his Majesty during the campaign, the accidental overturn of a carriage of the royal suite, removed her with awful precipitation from the sphere of her empty

pride; and she who, but an hour before, had reason to contemplate length of days for the furtherance of her countless projects, and the enjoyment of her dearly purchased family aggrandisement, was consigned to a foreign grave, without even a brief respite to receive the last consolations of our holy religion, or to arrange those worldly affairs, so important in her estimation. I lamented her loss with the sincere affection of a son;—she was the last friend who remained to me of my early days; and I honored her memory with all the outward testimonials in my power to bestow.

It was some months after her decease that I visited the Chateau de L——; and as she had seldom resided here of late years, I did not expect to find any papers of moment in her apartments. For the sake of form, however, I visited the *secrétaires* which belonged exclusively to her use; and having finished my search, I entered this boudoir, to pass the remainder of the day in solitary seclusion. The cabinets reminded me that my inves-

tigation had been incomplete ; and, having opened one of them with a *passe-par-tout*, I was surprised to find it filled with papers, carefully sealed. The first packet I unfolded struck me with further astonishment, as being in my own hand-writing ; and, on a nearer scrutiny, I found it to contain all the letters I had dispatched from the camp of Villars to my wife ; with an accompanying billet addressed to my mother by Lemaitre, my former valet, containing an exact detail of all my actions, and an assurance that, according to his engagement with her, he had permitted no letter from Mademoiselle de G rilly to meet my hand. Confounded by this proof of treachery, I scarcely dared proceed in my search—but the next packet still further increased my horror and dismay.

The first object that presented itself was a letter from Monsieur de St. F.—, the late minister, informing her “ that his Majesty, in consideration of the ancient honor of the House of L— had been pleased to comply with her solicitations, by placing the Marquis de L— under strict

arrest, till he should have joined the army ; and that, in order to prevent the disgraceful union she apprehended, a *Lettre de Cachet* was placed at her disposal, the execution of which would be remitted to the proper officers ; and that the *Courtezan G rilly* might be imprisoned in the Bastille, or at Bic tre, according to the inclination and judgment of the Duchesse."

The next letter was addressed to my mother by the Abb  de Tervines, a creature dependent upon her bounty, and a brother of my late tutor. He informed her with minute detail of his forcible entry into the house at St. Mand , on the very night of my arrest ; describing, with insolent familiarity, the agony and astonishment of " La G rilly," as he presumed to term my persecuted wife ; and the distress of her parting with her children, who were left under the charge of a village nurse at St. Mand  ; while their unfortunate mother was compelled to follow to the Bastille the Abb  and his crew, who were furnished with the fatal *Lettre de Cachet*, obtained by my mother.

“ I must needs confess,” wrote this minion of crime, with an insolence which the humiliation of guilt could alone have rendered endurable to my haughty mother; “ I must confess, that the G rily is, in spite of the degradation of her position, a noble creature. As she stood, half-veiled by her profuse raven hair, when her children were torn from her bosom—uttering no cry, but mute from very agony, I could have knelt—all courtesan as she is—before the dignity of her beauty; and I not only freely excuse the weakness of our little marquis, but can well understand that Mademoiselle de Viry, *malgr  les beaux yeux de sa cassette*, would have little chance against so witching an enchantress.”

This insolent farrago was followed by a similar production, announcing the death of my infant, and attributing its disorder to a too hasty removal from its mother. It also contained the copy of a deed, by which Armina was required in my name to acknowledge the illegality of her marriage, and the illegitimacy of her children, on

pain of perpetual separation from them, and imprisonment for life in the Bastile.

I had now exhausted two of the packets ; and paused in my agonizing task to pour execrations on the infernal cruelty and dissimulation of my mother—on my own feeble credulity!—But how were my sufferings increased by the opening of the third packet, containing a series of letters, addressed from the Bastille by Armina to my mother, and containing replies to the various propositions she had received! I trembled as I unfolded them for perusal, for I knew them well—those elegant characters.—The time had been that they were familiar unto me, even as those of my own hand ;—but now their sudden appearance brought back upon my mind a thousand long-lost images—restored to my ear a thousand forgotten tones of tenderness! The lost—the cold—the dead—stood once more before me in their former loveliness ; and in the intensity of my emotion I pressed the paper to my heart and lips—and lifted up my voice and wept, in mine hour of solitary agony !

Again through my tears, I strove to decipher their meaning—that meaning once so momentous to my happiness; again and again I sought to pierce through the obscuring tears, while the form of the writer seemed to arise between me and the paper I held in my trembling hands. I could not read—I could not see—I could but feel the white arm of Armina pressed round my sinking frame—I could but hear in imagination, her whispered words of endearment! Oh! God!—Oh! mighty God! with what renewed bursts of agony were those remembrances forced upon my heart!—till subdued and softened to the weakness of a child, I at length perused the following letter.

From the Bastille, Nov. 9, 17—.

Madam,—

To the surprise with which I have so unexpectedly found myself the object of your persecution, and the still greater astonishment and affliction with which I have discovered my child-

ren and myself to be suddenly abandoned to your cruelty by him whose arm should have been the first out-stretched to shield and succour us,—you must attribute the silence with which I have hitherto received your insulting offers. Could I believe that the heart whereon I have leant in the full security and devotion of affection, had become at once base and contaminated as your letters proclaim it,—could I believe that the mind of Armand had been corrupted by your counsels, and his principles perverted to the point of uniting in your measures, then might I renounce him as willingly as I now earnestly and proudly call upon him as my wedded husband, and as the father of my children, to save me from your inhuman and unwomanly cruelty ! But I feel that we are both equally victims to your machinations. By what arts we have been separated—by what abuse of power I have been torn from my peaceful home by the ruffian hands that do your bidding,—I, a stranger to your customs, an alien to your laws, can little guess. But this I know—

that the Almighty who permits, for his own wise purpose, the chastisements you inflict, will not suffer me utterly to perish in my innocence ;— and that the wife of Armand,—the mother of his helpless and beautiful boys, hath an innate sense of nobleness, which no degradation you can inflict will obliterate. Yes—my beloved children—for *you* I cherish the honours of which the cold and worldly-minded would deprive you ; nor shall my woman's cowardice shrink from any trial through which they may seek to intimidate me into compliance. Cold and hunger, pain, solitude, and desolation may work upon my frame of flesh, but my resolution and patient endurance shall at length plead for me with my persecutors."

Letter the Second.

" You have, indeed, with cunning cruelty, devised a means of suffering I had not anticipated. Yet surely you will not persevere in such persecution ? You are a woman—you will not surely deprive a mother of her babe she nourishes at

her bosom? You have taken away my children—the children of Armand!—Look in their faces, and you will perhaps retrace the features of his infancy. Remember your love for him; recall the tenderness with which you cherished his frail and delicate beauty—have mercy, then, upon *me*, and give back my boys to my care. You will find me submissive; but why have you visited upon *them* the perversity of their mother? I implore you no longer to delay my relief from my present state of torment.”

Letter the Third.

“Twelve hours have passed—you deign not to answer my supplication. In the name of God, take pity on a mother’s distraction!—You have withheld my infant from my bosom; and the fever which circulates in my veins may have already attacked its delicate frame. You know not how to sooth his sufferings—you cannot appease his hunger—you cannot relieve his wants
I can.—My babe will perish while you are

irresolute—oh! give him back to my arms, and I will be ever patient and obedient.”

Letter the Fourth.

“One word—only one—give me back my children, and I will subscribe to all your conditions,—I will renounce all my rights. Give me back my children, and we will depart for another country, and never trouble you or your’s again I will bow to the dust before you—I will sign all you require—only let me fold my babes once more to my bursting heart !”

The next letter contained in the packet was in a different handwriting.

“MADAME LA DUCHESSE !

“I have fully obeyed your instructions; but I pray God they may be the last of a similar nature that you may impose upon me. On receiving your commands, I entered the cell of Mademoiselle de G rilly, to lay before her the paper you had prepared for her signature. She

asked no questions, being exhausted by weakness and suffering,—she scarcely perused the instrument; but having hastily signed her name, she gazed wildly on the door, as if expecting her compliance with your terms to be immediately followed by the appearance of her children. And now the extreme difficulty of announcing the death of the infant, which you had required me to conceal till the important document was legalized, first became apparent. Pardon me, lady, but I now own that I had no courage to awaken the eloquence of maternal love which I saw hovering on her lips. I began by distantly adverting to the illness of her youngest child. She approached me rapidly, and in a low terrible voice she exclaimed, ‘Monster! you temporize—tell me all in one accursed word—you have murdered it!’ ‘You are harsh,’ I replied hesitatingly; ‘you will remember that the boy was already ill when’——but I spoke in vain—she was senseless at my feet.

The lady recovered but to learn that the young

Armand had been removed to a distant village, and that it would be some time before he could rejoin her. 'I verily believe thee,' she proudly answered; 'it is fitting that lying and hypocrisy should be added to cruelty. I might have foreseen that my compliance with the terms of the Duchesse de L—— would avail me nothing.'

"I have since, Madam, removed this lady to a more suitable apartment. I have no fear that, in her present feeble and dejected state, she should attempt escape, and she therefore suffers little constraint. I cannot, however, but apprehend that her mind is at times affected by the afflictions she has undergone. Her expressions are frequently incoherent and wild. She raves perpetually of some person named Lavisier; then, in an agony of despair, breaks into lamentations which my imperfect knowledge of the Italian language does not permit me to interpret. I respectfully wait your further commands."

Another letter from the preceding writer, ap-

parently the *concierge* of the Bastille, was addressed to Monsieur de Tervines, during the absence of my mother at Fontainebleau. "The Marquis's Italian mistress," it began, "is seized with a delirious fever. For God's sake inform me what steps are to be taken, as I am heavily responsible for her life. I believe that death would be a merciful release to the unhappy creature, who has been inconsolable since I announced to her the pretended decease of her remaining child; still it is fitting she should obtain relief and female attendance. At present, the paroxysms of her disorder, and her shrieks when she imagines that her children are in the act of being torn from her bosom, disturb the whole prison."

Another, of a later date, contained the following expressions.

"Your assistance, Monsieur l'Abbé, would greatly benefit my interesting prisoner. The jargon by which you contrived to pacify her feelings on your last visit has been of material benefit in our cause; and she has since been in a

calmer frame of mind than I have yet seen her.— Your assurances that the death of her two children has been a manifestation of divine vengeance, have sunk deeply into a mind enfeebled by disease and long suffering. I pray you, then, to come and complete your work of conversion. You will thus secure my young master from hereafter renewing a degrading connexion; and you will relieve from a most painful guardianship, your friend and servant,

“LE MAITRE.”

It would seem that the arguments described in this letter had been successfully employed; and that the persuasions and hypocritical cant of the Abbé de Tervines had overcome the already failing resolution of my beloved Armina. On referring to the date of that cruel letter which she had addressed to me during my imprisonment, and of which I had so misconstrued the sense, I found that the abettors of this infamous plot had not been long in consummating their work; and

that my martyred wife, believing me to be a party in all the persecutions practised against her, had been led from her prison to the convent where she had professed herself; and that the peace of that holy retreat had alone afforded her a refuge from her enemies.

Here, then, was food for my meditations; here were endless sources of self-accusation and remorse! The dying words of the confiding Gregorio once more sounded in my ears like a voice from the dead. "You will protect my child, when all other friends shall fail her!" and it was I—even I—the guardian thus solemnly constituted—who had pointed out her abode to her persecutors; and by my want of energy in defending her cause while I yet enjoyed my freedom, had betrayed her to the fiend-like machinations of my mother. In the disorder of my imagination, methought I heard her screams when barbarous and insulting hands were laid upon our darling children,—and saw her shrinking, in her hour of unconscious madness from the ruffians of the pri-

son ! I could no longer consider her as the enthusiastic worshipper, who, having cast behind her the pollutions of the world, had put on the wedding garment of conventual humility ; but I saw her agitated and gloomy, pursued even to the foot of the altar of God by dreadful remembrances, and lingering passions,—in vain imploring grace to grant forgiveness to her persecutors—in vain beseeching oblivion of the past. Oh ! my beloved—my injured—mine unoffending wife !—if earthly pity, if earthly love might in aught atone for thine injuries, surely thou hast already pardoned me from that high beatification into which thou hast now entered !

From the depth of despair into which I was thrown by the perusal of these atrocious papers, I was roused by a single dawning hope which they had excited in my heart. It would seem that, although my unnatural mother had imposed upon Armina by the pretended death of her elder child, the boy had been in reality removed to *Troyes*, and placed under the care of a tanner's

wife, to whom he had been afterwards apprenticed. This son might still survive ; and I trusted that my tenderness towards him would in some measure atone the wrongs of his mother. Already I burned to clasp to my aching heart all that remained to me of Armina de G rilly ; and already I destined him to share with my Gustave the gifts of my fortune and affection. I instantly returned to Paris, and addressed a confidential letter to the chief officer of police, containing the necessary instructions to trace out my boy, without declaring the nature of my interest in his welfare. I had not a moment's rest till I received his reply, which I will transcribe in all its heart-rending official coldness.

“ I have the honor, Monsieur le Duc, to inform you, that on receiving your letter, I used the utmost despatch in acquainting myself with every circumstance relating to the named Armand de G rilly, formerly domiciliated in the city of Troyes. The said Armand, at the age of nine years, was apprenticed to a tanner of the said

town, by one named Le Maitre, a servant to the late Duchesse de L——; in which situation he remained for five years. At the expiration of that time, being detected in the commission of several petty thefts, his indentures were cancelled; and being shortly afterwards detected in connexion with a gang of coiners, he was sentenced to be branded and sent to the galleys. His former nurse, in affection for the unhappy culprit, made instant application to the Duchesse de L—— by an exertion of her interest to obtain a mitigation of his sentence; which might have been easily obtained, in consideration of his extreme youth. But all intercession was declined by her Grace; and the boy was shortly afterwards transferred to Marseilles, where, having wounded himself mortally with the bayonet of one of his guards, he died on the road. Waiting the honor of further orders, I am, &c. &c.”

Yes! my Gustave—another victim had paid with his life the forfeit of my first deception,

My child—*your* brother—had become a branded criminal, when one, one word from my lips might have rescued him! Accursed woman! to what excesses did the insatiate ambition of thine evil and hardened heart betray thee!

That child, whose birth had been hailed with the fondest rapture of parental endearment, whose cradle had been watched as though it contained the choicest treasure of this earth,—who had been deprived by the lawless cruelty of my mother, of his natural protector—had been given over by her indifference to the hands of the public executioner! Forced by his state of deprivation into companionship with the vile and degraded, when

No mother's care
Shielded his infant innocence with prayer,—

no loving hand had pointed out the path of virtue to his erring footsteps—no tender heart had provided for his wants—or taught him to overcome them. What marvel, then, that the innate corruption of our nature had obtained the mas-

tery—and that my lost and outcast child should have become a thief—an abject and condemned felon!

Writhing beneath the sense of my injuries and calamities, one last, oppressive anxiety haunted my troubled spirit :—was the partner of my sufferings yet alive? Did my once-loved Armina still endure the burden of existence in the gloomy abode to which she had been condemned? My instant and trembling inquiries were readily answered by the registers of the almoner of my friend the archbishop of Paris :—“ The Sœur Armina, a professed nun of the *Retraite Chrétienne*, Faubourg St. Antoine, having exhibited shortly after her profession, symptoms of imbecility of mind, had been removed, according to the usage of religious houses, into an appointed ward of the hospital of Bicêtre.” Thither I now, in person, directed my inquiries. They were briefly answered. Within a few months after her reception, the patient had died—a confirmed but harmless idiot. They showed me her

grave in the cemetery annexed to the establishment ; it was marked by a plain, black, wooden cross, but even that was falling to decay.

So perished Armina and her first-born. One, at the age of twenty-three, a lunatic—the inmate of a public hospital ; the other, at a still earlier age, a felon and self-murderer.—My son, as I knelt upon the weeds that covered her neglected grave, I vowed to Almighty God that no intreaties should ever induce me in my ministerial career to grant a *Lettre de Cachet* !”

THE
REIGN OF TERROR.

A Tale.

In winter's tedious nights, sit by the fire
With good old folks, and let them tell thee tales
Of woeful ages long ago betid ;
And, ere thou bid good night, to quit their grief,
Tell thou this lamentable fall of mine,
And send the hearers weeping to their beds.

SHAKESPEARE.

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THE
REIGN OF TERROR.

CHAPTER I.

Who is it that comes thro' the forest so fast,
While night glooms around him,—while chill roars the blast?

M. G. LEWIS.

A BRISK autumnal gale was whistling through the avenue of the ancient Castle of Rocquigny, as a travelling carriage, attended by a single chasseur, approached rapidly from the forest towards its massive gateway.

“Would Monsieur desire to be driven to the grand entrance?” inquired the postillion. “Certainly,” replied in an indignant tone the attendant, whom the shock of their sudden stop had roused from an easy slumber, that defied equally the roughness of a paved road, and the tempestuous state of the evening; “certainly, blockhead!

Do you imagine that the Chevalier de Rochemore would sneak into the chateau like?"——"What means this uproar?" demanded the master of the angry *chasseur*, in an imperative voice.

The postillion prevented his reply by leaning back towards the calèche, and requesting the traveller to observe that there was apparently some brilliant entertainment at Rocquigny;—that the avenue, for the last mile, had been illuminated;—that the court-yard, seen through the half-open portal, ~~was~~ bright with torch-light;—and that the sounds of festivity mingled, ever and anon, with the rude blasts which made half of his rapidly uttered oration inaudible.

"And what then?" demanded Monsieur de Rochemore, looking around him on the evidences which a long reverie had hitherto prevented from exciting his observation.

"Would Monsieur wish under such circumstances to alight at the grand entrance in his travelling dress?"

Rochemore paused for a moment; then desiring the drivers to proceed at once to the sta-

bles, he threw himself back in the carriage, more abstracted than before ;—surprise and vexation, mingling with the emotion that had disturbed his spirit, for many leagues past of his journey. “ Still unchanged, my sapient kinswoman !” muttered he—“ vain and frivolous among these lonely hills, as in the *Faubourg St. Germain* ;—always seeking to supply the place of cheerfulness by tumult and disorder !—But what is this ?” he continued, when, having alighted from his carriage, he hastily entered the court-yard by a side door, and perceived lights moving within in every direction,—torches flaring—the uproar of boisterous merriment proceeding from the offices,—and a band of music stationed, in defiance of the weather, on the steps of the great hall. He instantly wrapt his cloak around him, and returning to the stables, inquired of a passing servant the cause of these unusual appearances.

“ The marriage of *Mademoiselle*,” replied the young man ; an inflexion of wonder at the ignorance of the querist mingling with the respect

commanded by his equipage and personal appearance.

“The marriage of Mademoiselle de Rocquigny,” still inquired Rochemore in a calm low voice;—“and with the Comte de Clairville?”

“Ah! Monsieur,” replied the lad, now joyfully recognizing the voice of the stranger, “a thousand pardons for my boldness. Shall I run to announce your unexpected arrival?”

“By no means, my good Felix,” replied Rochemore faintly.

“The young Chevalier,—will you permit me, Monsieur, to summon him from the ball-room?”

“Not for the world,” answered Rochemore, leaning against a pillar of the stone fountain that decorated the court-yard, and instinctively dashing some of the water on his forehead; “not for the world, my good fellow. Oblige me by assisting my servant to remove my baggage to my usual apartment.”

“Immediately, Sir. But—entreating Monsieur’s pardon for the liberty—I must acknowledge that there is not a single chamber un-

occupied in the Château ;—the whole province is united on the present joyous occasion.”

Rochemore’s first impulse was to throw himself into his carriage, and to turn his back for ever upon the domains and family of Rocquigny ; to renounce his kindred,—his friends,—his very country ;—and by wandering forth over the earth, wrecked in his fortunes as in his peace of mind, to avenge on himself the injuries of others. But a moment’s reflection strangely altered the colour of his thoughts. “ They have sowed the wind,” said he, “ let them reap the whirlwind ; on *them*, not on me, be the peril of the storm !” Then desiring that his effects might be removed to the room of his friend, Godefroi de Rocquigny, and enforcing his request for silence and dispatch by a golden fee to Felix, he followed his steps up a small staircase, and reached the deserted chamber of his friend without obstruction. After carefully securing the door against intrusion, he threw himself into a *fanteuil* before the fire, the light of whose decaying embers fitfully illuminated the

apartment ; and there, in loneliness and self-abandonment, he hid his face in his hands, and the rising emotions of his breast oppressed him almost to suffocation. But I must unveil the source of his affliction ere I can hope to excite sympathy in his behalf.

Léon de Rochemore, as the representative of one of the most distinguished families of the nobility of France, a family whose importance had been upheld for centuries by the successive occupation of the most honourable posts of its native province, as well as by its rich hereditary possessions, might boast a sufficient claim to our notice ; but his good gifts were not restricted to these ancestral endowments. He was in truth no unworthy descendant of the Paladins, whose grisly persons frowned in mimic array in the armoury of his paternal hall ; and he had already won, both in battle-field and lady's bower, more than one gallant trophy to swell the list of their achievements.

Having thus put forth his claims to personal

bravery and personal attraction, I will only add that his mind was intelligent, and his education as accomplished as that of the young nobles of his day. The more delicate distinctions of his character I must leave to be developed by my story.

About twelve months previous to the period at which it commences, the Chevalier de Rochemore had been invited to pass the autumn at the country residence of the young Comte de Clairville, who had been in early life his *camarade de collège*, and latterly his *comarade d'armes*; and whose estates on the borders of the forest of Rocquigny afforded greater facility for the enjoyment of field sports, than the more elegant residence of the family of Rochemore in the vicinity of the capital.

Ernest de Clairville, a few years the senior of Léon, had, nevertheless, from the milder and less active frame of his mind, acquired a habit of submission to his guidance, and deference to his councils in the ordinary routine of life. Affection and confidence had combined with natural

indolence to incline him to this submission; and Clairville, while he recognized in his friend a bolder spirit, and deeper energy of character, lost not so utterly his self-reliance as to be ignorant that on subjects where judgment and delicate discrimination are required, he was qualified to support his equal pretensions. In conceding to Léon the palm of elegant acquirements and a brilliant and powerful imagination, the world decreed to his more reserved companion that of graver scholarship and stronger powers of reasoning. Léon de Rochemore resembled the wild torrent of the mountains,—sparkling,—foaming,—leaping from rock to rock,—and alluring the untamed eagle to stoop from his aspiring flight and refresh himself in its unsullied waters; but Clairville, like the still stream of the valley,—deep,—calm,—and silent,—was possessed of qualities which could be far better applied to the common purposes of life. The bark of the traveller might glide secure upon its unruffled breast; or the wheels of industry owe their activity to its impulsion.

This striking difference of character,—the eager restlessness of the one—the easy indolence of the other,—contributed in a great measure to the good understanding existing between the young friends. “ I am as useful to you, Léon, as a wife, or a spaniel, or any other legitimate object of caprice and violence,” said Ernest to his companion, as he was laughingly persuaded to give up the promise of the forest covert on a sparkling October morning ; and, renouncing their projected *chasse*, to proceed to the Château de Rocquigny ; whose towers, rising on the last rock of a range of craggy hills, were seen above the rich foreground of the forest.

“ Nay, Clairville,” replied Léon, leaping from his horse in order to assist in coupling the favourite hounds, which the grumbling *garde de chasse* was reluctantly gathering together ; “ rather thank me, that by enacting the scape-goat, I spare you the peril of governing a yelping cur, or being governed by a scolding house-dame. But *en route !* we shall be in time for the dear

languid Baroness's breakfast table ; and I must justly distribute my powers of audience between the detail of her *migraine* of yesterday, and her pompous lord's dissertation on the decline and fall of manorial privileges." " While I," thought Clairville, as he silently followed the rapid pace of his friend, " may devote my visit to its usual purport ;—admiration of the gentle bearing and placid smiles of their lovely daughter."

It might, perhaps, have occurred to a worldly mind, that those very smiles afforded a more probable motive for Rochemore's sudden disgust to the morning's chase, than his affected value for the society of the Baron ; who had been long denounced between them as the most intolerable proser of the Canton. But there were two sufficient causes for the blindness of Clairville. Léon de Rochemore had been for many years affianced to his only sister ; and he had himself forewarned his friend of his intentions to put forth an early claim to the hand of Mademoiselle de Rocquigny ;

a claim which his birth and fortune, as well as his personal character, would probably render highly acceptable to her family. Clairville strong in integrity and honourable principles, would have scorned to indulge in suspicions of his friend, on grounds that had been offensive if applied to himself; and he was therefore blind, and wilfully blind, to the conscious and confused manner in which the salutations of the graceful Léon were offered to, and received by the object of his secret attachment. Without perceiving that he was obeying the direction of a master-hand, he found himself compelled to pay his court to the solemn Baron de Rocquigny, and his invalid coquette of a wife, while he left to Léon the more inviting task of describing to the attentive Estelle the success of their morning's early sport, and their voluntary abandonment of its allurements to pass a short hour in her presence.

There was, however, one member of the family of Rocquigny who was somewhat more alive to

the ill-disguised pleasure with which the attentions of Rochemore were received. This was the Maréchale d'Olonne, the mother of Madame de Rocquigny; and while the Baroness was occupied in displaying with picturesque languor, the *douillette* in which it was her pleasure to envelop her still lovely person during her annual interment in her provincial grave, her wiser mother was anxiously awake to the perils which menaced the young daughter of her house.

The Maréchale, educated and fostered in all the narrow prejudices of the *ancienne noblesse*, had wasted her eloquence for several years succeeding the birth of Estelle, in persuading her fanciful daughter to select one of the most distinguished Parisian convents for her place of education. But Madame de Rocquigny, weak in her affections as in all beside, had considered her courage unequal to the separation; an *attaque de nerfs* regularly succeeded all discussion on the subject of parting from her darling; and at length her persevering folly wearied her anxious solici-

tress, and preserved her from further molestation. Estelle, under the charge of able teachers, and the directions of a careful governess, was permitted to snatch such opportunities of acquirement as the caprices of her fashionable mother would allow; and such was fortunately the natural docility of her character, and so reasonable the turn of her mind, that the influence of eight months passed in the capital, where the Baroness contrived to render her lessons unavailing, was insufficient to counteract that of the remaining four, which enabled her to profit by the seclusion of the Château de Rocquigny. There, under the care of Madame de la Tour, she was permitted to add the graces of a polished mind, and the more solid advantages of religious principle to the elegance of address and worldly tact, which she could not fail to gather from the counsels and example of her highly interesting, aged relative. But the character of a person so venerable, and so venerated, deserves to be considered with more than a passing notice.

CHAPTER II.

Lorsque vers son déclin le soleil nous éclaire,
L'éclat de ses rayons n'en est point affaibli :
On est vieux à vingt ans, si l'on cesse de plaire,—
Et qui plait à cent ans, meurt sans avoir vicilli.
VOLTAIRE.

MADAME la Maréchale d'Olonne might be cited as one of the last living specimens of that school of Parisian refinement, which united, with lingering tenacity, every better attribute of the preceding age ;—the courtly stateliness of the time of Louis le Grand, with the witty but somewhat too easy gaiety of the Regency. Her graceful vivacity had been a chief ornament of the circle of Versailles during the long reign of Louis the Fifteenth ; and as she had escaped the degradation sought and cherished by many of the greatest and most

virtuous of the female *noblesse*—an intimate association with Mesdames de Pompadour and Du Barri,—she was equally preserved by the same honorable principles, and the same sense of her own dignity, from incurring the censures of the malicious, through the friendship with which she had been unremittingly distinguished by the King himself. But while she was accused by the courtiers of want of sagacity to profit by her interest, and by their wives of want of courage to drive from the Court the shameless courtezans by whose intrusion it was polluted, she was satisfied to retire to the decent privacy of a happy home, and to shelter her feelings in the family circle where she reigned supreme.

Since the accession of his present Majesty, Madame d'Olonne had only once emerged from her retirement, in order to pay her *dévoirs* to that young and lovely Queen who, as Dauphiness, had frequently resorted to her known experience for counsel and guidance. Alas! in contemplating the brilliant rising of the star of promise, how

little had she anticipated the storms which, ere its meridian, were destined to obscure its brightness ! How little had she dreamed, while admiring the solicitude with which the people of France attached themselves to the footsteps of Marie Antoinette, that those very hands, lifted up in joyous acclamation, would shortly be outstretched to curse the object of their present idolatry—to demand her life,—nay, to dye their polluted members in her very heart's blood !

But if the Maréchale d'Olonne were unvisited by apprehensions of public calamity, the peaceful tenor of her life was soon to be disturbed by anxieties of a private nature. Those warm affections which the heartless frivolity of her daughter, and the deaths of her husband and son, had left without an object, had long been concentrated in a tender attachment towards her lovely grandchild. Estelle had become from her infancy the hope, the solace, the dream of Madame d'Olonne's old age ; and now that her dawning beauty excited in her mother a half-jealous, half-exulting

sensation of maternal vanity, and in her father the ambitious projects of a man of the world, it woke a thousand vague apprehensions in the more discriminating mind of the Maréchale. Chained by the prejudices of her *caste* to its follies and abuses, a *mariage de convenance* appeared to her, as inevitably as to the family of Rocquigny, the destined portion of its young representative ; but her affection for this darling object of her care had already, and for the first time, permitted feelings of doubt and anxiety to mingle with her projects.

“ Yes,” argued she in her moments of secret inquietude, “ it is indeed impossible that a child of her age should be allowed the dangerous liberty of selection ; but I may at least lament the existence of those worldly usages which must deprive her of a privilege so dear to a young heart, and the injudicious partiality which has permitted her eye to range, and her ear to welcome the ‘ leperous distilment’ of flattery, ere her heart has received its first impulse at the altar. Had that

pure and gentle heart remained secure in the convent whence her mother issued only to pronounce her vows of fidelity to the husband assigned to her acceptance by the common voice of her family, I had been spared my present alarm lest the attentions of yonder graceful boy should weaken the influence of Monsieur de Clairville over her feelings."

Stimulated by such apprehensions, the old lady was not slow to increase the peril of her lovely pupil, by warning her of the dangers that menaced her peace. Estelle, pure and spotless as the flowers which formed the only ornament of her attire, had hitherto attributed the delight with which she hailed the daily arrival of Léon de Rochemore to the pleasure afforded by his society to her father, her mother, and her young brother. She perceived that, both as a hearer and a speaker, he was an invaluable addition to their family circle. He was equally ready to endure with patience the diffuse verbosity of the Baron, and to attempt the yet more toilsome task of dispelling

those *vapeurs noirs*, by which the Baroness was haunted from the moment she crossed the draw-bridge of the Castle of Rocquigny, to the happy hour which reinstalled her in the Rue de Grenelle ;—and to soothe the imaginary sufferings, which could only be alleviated by a well-imagined compliment on the last new *coiffure* forwarded to her barbarous solitude by Mademoiselle Bertin ; or by a witty version of the last idle tale of scandal forged or embellished in the *Faubourg St. Germain*. While after his laborious efforts to satisfy the voracious appetite of discontented vanity, to enliven the faded weariness of an *ennuyée*, he would direct all the playful originality of his lively mind to the amusement and instruction of the young Godefroi, who was upon the point of entering upon a military career. All this judicious deference to the tastes of her nearest connections had hitherto appeared to Estelle as the charm which embellished the character and bearing of the Chevalier de Rochemore ; but undeceived by the representations of the Maréchale,

she was compelled to acknowledge that his merit, in her eyes, consisted neither in his eloquence, his brilliancy, nor even in his patience; but in the air of silent and intense reverence with which he gazed upon herself.

“Chide me not, dearest Madam,” she would reply to the expostulations of the Maréchale d’Olonne, “in justice, chide me not that I prefer the varying brilliancy of Monsieur de Rochemore’s conversation, to the sententious dulness of that of the Comte de Clairville. I am not insensible to his merits;—I know that his observations are generally just, although not so frequently well-timed; but from his morning bow to his parting salutation, I know his visits by heart. When he arrives, I could predict the very chair on which he will place himself, and that it will occupy the *beau milieu* exacted by the most scrupulous ceremony between mine and that of mamma.”

“Possibly—and politeness you will acknowledge to be an essential branch of minor morals.”

“ But surely there exists a more delicate order of politeness,—an unobtrusive deference, which is preferable to the mere ordinary bowing, cringing, speechifying virtue he possesses? Then if, at your instigation, I flatter him by an inquiry, I can as surely anticipate the sober, serious answer, as if it were the solution of a school problem.”

“ While from Léon you would probably receive either a covert but exaggerated compliment, or some flippant axiom of Parisian *persiflage*. Is it not so, Estelle?”

“ I never yet heard one word of flattery from Monsieur de Rochemore,” replied Mademoiselle de Rocquigny; “ and if my memory, dear Madam, does not mislead me, I have seen his lively sallies rewarded by a smile even from yourself.”

“ *Occasionally* perhaps, while my undivided attention is ever at the command of Clairville, and is assuredly repaid by—”

“ *Chère bonne maman*,—do not borrow the Count’s tone of remonstrance—”

“Do not yourself, Estelle, assume Monsieur de Rochemore’s levity. No!—your caresses, your blandishments, my beloved child, shall not deter me from laying bare the sickly vanity which binds you to Léon; from assuring you, Estelle, that the sober calmness you despise will become a valuable quality in your estimation, should the wishes of your family be fulfilled by your union with Ernest de Clairville. That flippant gaiety which, to your unpractised mind, assumes the value of originality, is in truth the mere jargon of society, tinctured by a *ton de garnison* which is offensive to a well-bred ear.”

But Estelle heard not these severe strictures upon her favourite; from the moment the Maréchale had named her union with Clairville, she had become gloomy, abstracted and silent. At length, and rather in reply to her own train of thoughts than to the remonstrances of Madame d’Olonne, she observed, thoughtfully, “And Léon, by his marriage with Louise de Clairville, will become our brother; their engage-

ment was determined during his last visit to Normandy."

"Considering the rank and credit of Monsieur de Clairville's family connections," replied the Maréchale, peevishly, "I should think such an accession utterly unimportant; and I must again, and seriously, Mademoiselle, advise you to refrain from"—

"Do not call me *Mademoiselle*, my own dearest friend," whispered Estelle, with the tears in her eyes, "and do not speak in that terrible tone. Believe me that the Chevalier de Rochemore is nothing to me except from the importance your fears have assigned him; and his engagement with my friend Louise has alone led to our familiar intercourse."

Estelle, as she affectionately kissed the hand of her grandmother, and retired from her presence, was satisfied that her arguments had been convincing; but the Maréchale was too acute an observer, too experienced a student of the human heart, to be deceived by the representations of one

who was herself the dupe of her own feelings, or imagination. She therefore estimated, according to their true danger, the walks—the rides—the long conversations—the longer, and still more perilous silence, shared between Estelle and the Chevalier de Rochemore, under the sanction of her frivolous daughter ; and though she was satisfied, from the habitual candour of her ingenuous grandchild, that no understanding between the parties at present existed, she was lost in amazement when, shortly after the conversation I have related, Léon suddenly, and without explanation, withdrew himself from their society, and disappeared from Paris ; where the opportunities afforded by the brilliant and perpetual festivities of the hôtel de Rocquigny had confirmed the intimacy of the young friends. Had it not been for the restless uneasiness betrayed by Estelle, she might have suspected that they were already bound by a secret engagement. But it was to *herself* that the suffering girl confided her surprise and sorrow, when days, weeks, nay, even

months passed away, and Leon returned not ;— it was from *her* indulgent sympathy, that Estelle sought consolation in this unexpected desertion.

“ You must not blame him, my child,” she would reply to Mademoiselle de Rocquigny’s sorrowful appeal to her tenderness: “ let us rather be thankful that Monsieur de Rochemore’s feelings have been roused, however late, to a sense of justice towards his betrothed wife, and the family of Clairville.”

“ But I have often assured you, dear Madam, that Léon never for a single instant assumed with me the tone or language of a lover ; he never breathed a wish nor an intention that could be construed into an offence by the Clairvilles, and surely you must admit that he chooses a strange mode of proving his devotion to Louise, by disappearing from among us without declaring any reason for his absence, or giving any clue to his present abode.”

“ He has just sense enough to be aware that *both*

ought to be, and are sufficiently indifferent to us."

"Not to *us*, madam, not to *me*."

"Well, then, what motive shall we assign for your protégé's abrupt departure? *Caprice*, Estelle; mere ordinary, vulgar caprice! He has sported with your feelings in an unbecoming manner; and would now either escape the inconveniences likely to arise to himself from your evident attachment, or would perhaps gratify his vanity by exciting and exhibiting the imprudencies it may urge you to commit."

"You cannot surely think him so ungenerous!"

"I think him something far worse, Estelle—I believe him to be *unprincipled*. He knew from the first that the engagements entered into by your family, as well as his own peculiar situation, rendered your marriage impossible. An *honourable* man would have sought safety in flight at the very first indication of an attachment arising under such circumstances."

Estelle replied not; and the Maréchale pursued

her advantage by portraying, in lively contrast, the characters of Léon and of the Comte de Clairville. Her knowledge of the romantic turn of Mademoiselle de Rocquigny's mind, led her to enlarge upon the manly disinterestedness of Ernest—upon his strong family attachment—upon the high reputation that had been secured him by the proud and self-denying rectitude of his conduct; and, lastly, for what woman would neglect so powerful an appeal to the foible of her sex, lastly, she set forth, in glowing colours, his silent but undeviating devotion to her lovely auditress.

After many ineffectual renewals of their conversation on this topic, Estelle began to listen with patience, and at length with interest, to the arguments enforced by Madame d'Olonne. She even learned to endure the pompous details with which her father loved to describe the points of union between his hereditary estates, and those of Clairville; and to retrace the illustrious pedigree common to "both their houses." Nay, she condescended, at last, to sanction the enthusiasm with

which the Baroness figured forth the splendour of her *corbeille de mariage*, and exhausted her fancy in the invention of the *trousseau*.

But why should I minutely describe the gradual change of her feelings? Do not our most esteemed poets "write odes on the inconstancy of woman;" and do we not, in vulgar prose, bear daily witness to the justice of their accusations? Will any one deny that "*L'absent a toujours tort*?" or can one female heart presume to undervalue the power of daily pleading,—of earnest solicitation—the overpowering influence of a sincere and fervent affection?

If not, let my fair inconstant stand forgiven, and myself excused a detail of love and courtship, which ended naturally, and as it ought, with the solemnization of a marriage between Marie Estelle de Rocquigny, and Ernest, Comte de Clairville.

CHAPTER III.

“ And now I am come, with this lost love of mine,
To tread but one measure,—drink one cup of wine.”
WALTER SCOTT.

STUNNED by the shock of the cruel disappointment that had befallen him, Monsieur de Rochemore passed a painful hour in the solitude of Godfroi de Rocquigny's apartment; indulging now in fruitless self-upbraiding, and now in the formation of plans for his future bearing.

His pride readily determined the colouring to be given to his sudden departure and as sudden return; and he resolved that the mortification of appearing as a forsaken lover, circumvented in his plans and expectations, should at least be spared him.

He had scarcely determined on the line of con-

duct to be adopted, when a loud knocking at the door disturbed the course of his reflections; and in a moment, Godefroi, followed by servants bearing lights, rushed into the room, and was clasped in the arms of his friend.

“ My dear Léon, this is the most unexpected, the most welcome accession to our family party! To what accident are we indebted for your return, after so long and mortifying a silence?”

“ To what *accident*? Nay! can you doubt my anxiety to be amongst you as soon as intelligence of the happy event of to-day reached me? Although still in the south of Italy, I resolved, in spite of time or space, to be present at the ceremony,—and here I am!—too late it is true for the solemn rites of the church, but ready to assist at all your ensuing *fêtes* in the train of my liege lady, your charming mother.”

“ Our *fêtes*—and with those haggard looks—that air of weariness? *Mais tu es changé, mon ami, à faire peur;—ou ne reconnoit plus le beau Lindor!* I fear you are overcome by your

journey: surely it were better that you should retire to rest, than join our party to night?"

"And prove myself unworthy of the title of *Chevalier François*, by indulging in the ordinary and degrading sensations of fatigue, while within my hearing

"La beauté—la danse—la musique,
De cent plaisirs font un plaisir unique."

No, no,—Godefroi," said Rochemore, rising, and glancing from the brilliant uniform of his friend to his own travelling trunk, "spare me so un-knightly a reproach. Half an hour will suffice to repair at once my faded splendour and jaded spirits. One glass of *chambertin*, and the aid of your trusty Felix, and I shall be in time to present myself at the feet of the bride."

"And of Mademoiselle de Clairville?" whispered Godefroi significantly. "She is with us, Léon, and in the highest beauty. I conclude this is the fair lady's first insight into the world since she left her convent; for truly the wandering dove of the ark could not have appeared

more shrinkingly timid when she contemplated the troubled waters of the earth. The news of your arrival, Rochemore, agitated her very painfully."

Léon shuddered ; but with a renewed request for the services of Felix, he dismissed his young friend, and in less than the time he had claimed for his toilet, he entered the brilliant and crowded saloon of Madame de Rocquigny.

So high a solemnity as the marriage of a daughter of the house of Rocquigny, was celebrated with the magnificence due to its importance. The most profuse elegance reigned at once in the decorations of the mansion, and the attire of the guests. But among the gorgeous costumes of the provincial nobles, and even among the numerous military friends of the younger Rocquigny present on the occasion, there was not a single person whose graceful figure, nor whose splendid appointments could vie with those of Léon de Rochemore, as he bowed with assumed devotion before his delighted hostess, and with an air of still deeper respect as he addressed

her venerable mother. He replied to their compliments and inquiries with easy self-possession ; and if his brow were pale, and his hand icy as the dead, all was naturally interpreted into the effects of a long and toilsome journey.

“ We have been tortured with uneasiness on your account, my dear Léon,” said Madame de Rocquigny, languidly adjusting the jewelled ornaments of her sleeve. “ It was absolutely barbarous in you to excite our alarm in so unnecessary a manner. Sometimes we believed you to be a prisoner in the dungeons of the inquisition at Rome,—and sometimes,” she continued, with smiling apathy, “ sometimes we actually believed that you had fallen a victim to the ferocious banditti of the *Campagna*. Now tell me, dearest Rochemore, is it true that the Roman ladies use no perfumes—wear no colours?—Ah ! *juste ciel !* —*quel horreur.*”

“ Monsieur de Rochemore will perceive,” interrupted Madame d'Olonne, in a low significant voice, “ that his mysterious silence would have

excited more surprise and deeper anxiety, had not the caprice natural to his age and disposition afforded us a ready consolation; and still more so, had not the welfare of our own Estelle peculiarly interested our feelings at the present moment. Her happiness now assured," she continued, glancing with unconcealed exultation to that part of the room where the young Countess was seated, "we are at liberty, Chevalier, to inquire into your own mischances, and to sympathize—"

"Neither interest nor sympathy, let me beg of you, Madame la Maréchale," interrupted Léon, with a smile of defiance. "I am, at present, too much overjoyed to seek for either; and before I begin my recital of adventures, according to the most approved custom of *Chevaliers-errants*, permit me to intreat your permission to offer my homage to the Comtesse de Clairville."

"Ah! come—come, dear Léon," exclaimed Madame de Rocquigny, playfully leading him towards the bride. "You will no longer recognize your little playfellow. *Notre petite Comtesse*

est devenue la raison même ; elle est sage et posée comme on ne l'est plus.—D'ailleurs elle est charmante aujourd' hui, et mise à ravir ! Monsieur Léon va deviner de suite que c'est moi qui doit avoir imaginée cette toilette là ;" exclaimed the voluble Baroness, drawing him on. She was misled, however, by a mother's vanity in believing that Estelle appeared to advantage in her bridal attire ; for, harassed by fatigue, and distressed by the public exhibition to which she was compelled by the ill-judged customs of the day, she sat in wearisome splendour at the head of the room. The glitter of the magnificent diamonds with which her brows were encircled and her dress enriched, exhibited still more painfully the death-like paleness which suddenly overspread her countenance as Rochemore approached ; and although her lips moved in reply to his well-turned and unembarrassed *compliment d'usage*, no sound escaped them.

Their eyes had met !—and one single look—one intense look of inquiry and sorrow had re-

vealed as much in record of the past, as served to invalidate the assurances of joy with which he strengthened the expression of his compliment. Yes, *love*—love and reproach united in the deep tone of that well-remembered voice, in the steady gaze of those pleading eyes : so true it is that where a mutual understanding has ever existed, a single glance will suffice to counteract the concealments of years,—to betray the most perilous secret of the confiding heart wherein it hath been vainly cherished ! Estelle knew in one moment that she was still fondly—hopelessly beloved ;—and although she would have angrily denied to the appeal of her own conscience that the affection was mutual, she could not succeed in concealing from Léon that the past was as faithfully remembered by her as by himself.

Their embarrassment was fortunately relieved by the intervention of Monsieur de Clairville's warm and ready welcome to his friend. If any suspicion of the truth had, during the absence of Léon, disturbed, for an instant, the serenity of

his mind, and diminished his regard for the favourite companion of his childhood, all was now forgotten in the security of his confirmed happiness. He looked, in short, and smiled, and spoke, as became a bridegroom; and while Léon secretly cursed him with the imprecations of a bitter hatred, he continued to pour forth the most rapturous assurances of welcome to his uninvited guest.

“We were speaking of your arrival but yesterday, as one of the impossible pleasures, and wishing for the wand of *la fée Lumineuse* to transplant you hither; were we not, dearest Estelle?” said the Count, turning affectionately to his trembling wife.

How did that little word *we* grate upon the ear of the indignant Léon! How often, in his secret self-communing, had he applied it in expressive tenderness to himself and to the pale but lovely form before him! and how ardently did he yearn even now to clasp her to his heart in the sight of all men, and, in defiance of family compacts—of ties rendered holy both by civil and

religious ceremonies, to proclaim her his,—*his* by the unimpeachable bond of first and mutual affection,—*his* only—and for ever !

But the remembrance of their relative positions quickly altered his determination ; and while his consciousness of the bitter truth seemed to wither the warm pulses of his heart, he attempted to inflict some portion of the torments he endured upon the innocent sufferer who stood shrinking from the expression of his dark and penetrating glances.

“ I have indeed reason to be grateful to the *memory* of Madame de Clairville,” he replied, bowing with profound reverence, but tincturing his humility with a smile of the most scornful irony.

The expression, however, of his angry indignation had a very different effect upon its object from that he had anticipated. A look of suffering,—one word of half-repressed affliction, would have broken the heart of Estelle ; but Monsieur de Rochemore’s disdainful taunt roused the pride

of her soul to unusual excitation. The blood which had gathered oppressively round her heart, flowed freely again ; and mounting to her cheek, spoke in eloquent reply to his sarcasm. She assumed courage and forbearance graciously to accept the hand which Léon, at the pressing instigation of Clairville, now offered, to lead her to the dance ; and even the Maréchale, whose attention was fixed in breathless anxiety upon her movements, felt re-assured by the graceful self-possession with which she acquitted herself.

Surprised, and even awed by this unexpected assumption of firmness in a creature so frail,—so delicate,—Léon stood in silence by her side during the first pauses of the dance. At length, towards the conclusion, he drew nearer to her, and without daring to look upon her face, he whispered in a voice almost inaudible from emotion, “ Estelle ! it was not *here*—it was not *thus* that I had looked forward to our meeting. Estelle—answer me by one word,—are you utterly insensible to my disappointment—to my misery ?”

Madame de Clairville replied not ; and again, and in a voice of deeper agitation, Léon reiterated his inquiry. She was silent for awhile, but replied at length, “ You speak as though it had been only *yours* to suffer ;—as though *you* alone had a right to complain. But I am to blame to venture even thus far, with one so callous, so reckless of the feelings of others as you have proved yourself ; and I must remember, as I earnestly pray of you to do, Monsieur de Rochemore, that I am now the wife—the willing wife of your earliest friend. As *his* friend, not as my own, shall I henceforth regard you—and for our remaining years, let silence and forgetfulness be between us !”

She raised her eyes in uttering these last words, and perceived that tears were silently falling from those of Léon. As she looked upon his affliction, her heart seemed smitten as with a sudden blow—the lover of her youth appeared to stand before her—and the dance being ended, she took his arm, and scarcely conscious of what she did,

she drew towards her husband. Léon imagined for a moment that as she leant heavily upon him, his arm was voluntarily pressed to her side. And it might be so; for with sudden consciousness she started from him as from a viper; and throwing herself on a seat by Clairville, she covered her face with her hands, and wept bitterly.

This unconcealed display of sensibility drew towards the young Countess the attention of her family, and, indeed, of the whole assembly; but while it was plausibly attributed, by the presence of mind of Madame d'Olonne, to the heat of the ball-room and the laborious ceremonies of the day, and by her husband to some more flattering cause, Léon saw but too plainly that his presence had sufficed to embitter the chalice which, previous to his arrival, had been rendered palatable by the self-delusions of her heart. And while some indifferent observers, in gazing upon the tears of the bride, were prompted to inquire, "What business had they there at such a time?" he ex-

ulted in the betrayal they avouched. But in order to guard the object of his idolatry from the suspicions of the crowd, he compelled himself to remain in the saloon for full an hour after she had retired ;—to mingle with the indifferent saunterers of the ball,—to listen to the importunate pleasantries of Godefroi,—and to endure all with a calm and cheerful countenance.

At length his trial was over ; and once fairly withdrawn from the observation of the joyous guests of the Baron, he rushed to the chamber of his friend, and buried his burning head, his beating heart in the bed that had been hastily prepared for him ; nor did he give any sign of existence till the morning light ended the festivities of the château, and brought his weary companion from his toilsome task of pleasure.

In after life, he frequently looked back upon that night as the most painful of his existence.

CHAPTER IV.

The wedding guest
He beat his breast,
For he heard the loud bassoon.

COLERIDGE.

THE light slumbers that had fallen upon Léon de Rochemore's weary spirit after the arrival of Godefroi, were interrupted but too early by the sound of music. A clear, shrill chorus of female voices roused him from his bed; and partly occupied his attention, as in a hurried manner he proceeded to throw on his clothes. The words of the song, if I may presume to divest them of the sprightly *naïveté* of their original *patois*, ran as follows; and, unlike more modern choruses, they were rather thrown out by the deep arpeggio accompaniment of rustic instruments,

than overpowered by a continuous rush of opposing harmony from the orchestra.

CHORUS OF VILLAGE MAIDENS.

Farewell to thee!—sweetest,
And fairest, and best !
May the homage thou meetest
Bring peace to thy breast !
Contentment and rest
Round thy path gently hover,
And the love thou hast blest
Linger still with thy lover !

Be happy ! when roaming
In far-distant bowers,
Where the sun shines, o'ercoming
The brightness of ours ;
But let *these* honoured towers—
Let the home left behind thee,
Bear a charm that o'erpowers—
The new ties that bind thee !—

Bright spring of our river !
Fair flower of our earth !
Thou leavest for ever
The scene of thy birth ;—

But the thought of thy worth
To our minds oft returning,
Shall chasten our mirth
With the shadows of mourning.

As the *refrain* died away, Léon, leaving his companion to the tardy cares of Felix, followed the sound of the music till it led him along a corridor towards the head of the staircase that commanded the great hall. He perceived that the banners and escutcheons with which it was decorated had been cleansed from their obscuring cobwebs, in honour of the festivities of the château; and that the balustrade over which he leant, to observe the scene beneath, was garlanded with festoons of evergreens.

In solemn order, round the hall below, were ranged the tenants of the lands of Rocquigny, in the richest suits which their strict provincial *costume* might allow. They bore each a separate offering of flowers, arranged according to their individual fancy; the young maidens of the vil-

lage being gathered in a group to the left of the door leading to the state apartment ; and the married peasants being stationed on the opposite side. The former of these bands proved to be the musicians whose vocal efforts had broken in upon the rest of Monsieur de Rochemore ; and as he still stood gazing intently upon the picturesque arrangement of the spacious vestibule, the folding doors were suddenly thrown open, and the young Countess de Clairville, clad in flowing robes of virgin white, and her fair face still more purely delicate, appeared leaning on the arm of the Vicomte d'Estrées, the governor of the province. She was followed by the Count in a habit stiff with gold and embroidery, supporting the Maréchal d'Olonne ; while a long train of family connections, including all the distinguished *noblesse* of Bretagne followed them into the hall.

As she advanced, the invisible orchestra again sent forth a faint symphony, and the young bride was greeted by the peasants with the following.

CHORUS.

Welcome to our matron band !—

Welcome ! thou to whom are given
Love and honor in the land,—

Joy on earth—and trust in Heaven !
Peace be with thee !—angels guard thee,
And for gentle deeds reward thee !

Tasks unknown await thee now,
Household duties,—thrifty cares,—
And to shade thy thoughtful brow,
The sober coif its folds prepares ;
Yet fairest thus, while wedded duty
Sheds holiest lustre o'er thy beauty !

And soon, a mother's joys shall teach
Thy heart, the riches of a wife ;—
The tottering step—the lisping speech—
The first sweet flowers of infant life,
Shall to new hopes—new raptures move thee,
And yield new hearts to serve and love thee.

And age will come, and death at last,
Nor armed with fears—nor sad with gloom ;
Affection o'er their path shall cast
Flowers of a pure unearthly bloom ;
And hope thy later years adorning
Shall yield a sunset bright as morning.

Then welcome to our matron band !
Welcome ! thou to whom are given
Love and honor in the land ;—
Joy on earth—and trust in Heaven !
Peace be o'er thee—angels guard thee,
And for holy deeds reward thee !

Two pages, in the liveries of Rocquigny and Clairville, now advanced to the side of the young Countess ; holding a large basket, tied with white ribbons, in which she listlessly deposited the garlands and bouquets of flowers severally offered by the tenants ; to whom she was equally endeared by her hereditary claims to their respect, and by the tender mercies she had exercised among them from her earliest years. She smiled,—but it was with a hollow, heartless smile—in return for the humble courtesy with which each gift was tendered ; and she spoke not, as was her wont, to those who were more particularly the objects of her protection. Not a smile, however, not a breath,—not a glance,—escaped the notice of Léon, whose eyes were riveted upon her form above.

At length a cross covered with violets was placed in her hands, with deep reverence, by a young girl, whom he readily recognized as her foster sister. It might be that the rarity of the flower at that late or early season attracted the notice of the Countess ; it might be that her tender and grateful attachment towards the mother of Valentine, or even that the exquisite beauty of the young peasant insured the especial favour of Estelle towards her humble offering ; for earnestly regarding the cross she held, she stripped a bunch of flowers from the wooden frame, and hastily placed them within the richly tissued draperies of her bosom.

Léon felt the blood rush to his temples as he noticed this apparently trifling incident. The period was still fresh in his memory, when the same flowers had been made a daily pledge of affection between them. He remembered—for what fantastic predilection finds not its grace in the recollection of a lover—the enthusiastic preference accorded by Estelle to the deep intense

hue, the rich fragrance of her favourite flower. He remembered the pains it had cost him to surprise her with a constant succession; and he felt persuaded that the same reminiscences affected her as painfully as himself. He sighed with the despairing vehemence of one secure from observation, and smote his hand upon a heart that beat too strongly for its peace!

He was instantly startled by a violent burst of laughter near him; and on turning round, he perceived the Chevalier de Rocquigny attentively regarding him. "My dear Léon," he exclaimed, "how long have you affected the tragic vein?" Then throwing himself into a theatrical attitude, he continued,

Grace aux Dieux, mon malheur passe mon espérance;
 Oui-je te loue, oh Ciel! de ta persévérance;
 Appliqué sans relâche au soin de me punir,
 Au comble des douleurs tu m'as fait parvenir.

Léon could not refuse the tribute of a smile to the exquisite mimicry of *Lekain*, with which Rocquigny embellished his energetic declamation; and it only changed in character when he heard

the depression of his spirits attributed to the postponement of his marriage with Mademoiselle de Clairville.

“Trust me,” he replied, rallying himself to meet the charge, “trust me, Rocquigny, I have lived too long in this sinful world of ours, to waste sigh or sorrow on mortal woman; and surely so sprightly a *chevalier* as yourself might have guessed that 'tis no enlivening sound for one about to gird on the fetters of wedlock, when he hears them clanking ominously on the limbs of another.”

Godefroi interrupted him by a lively compliment to the charms of his affianced wife; and was about to conduct him down the great staircase, when another strain rose in rich harmony from the group below, and swelling upwards, filled the groined roof with its powerful echo. Before the close of its final stanza, the two young men had descended into the hall, and were joined to the brilliant assemblage which seemed to di-

vide their attention with the village beauties by whom they were surrounded; while Léon anxiously sought an opportunity to attract the notice of the fairest among them,—the graceful Valentine.

CHAPTER V.

This looks not like a bridal.

Much ado about nothing.

SINCE the days of Selby House and Shirley Manor, novelists have shrunk with dismay from the task of describing the minutiae of those weddings, which three elaborate volumes have hardly sufficed to bring about. Even the public journals of the day can scarcely be bribed to record more than the officiation of the very Reverend the Dean, or the right Reverend the Bishop; with a brief notice of some enchanting villa on the banks of the Thames, to which the bride and bridegroom are mysteriously whirled by Newman's iron-greys. In truth, the present mode of celebrating the holy rites of marriage, affords small

scope to the descriptive powers of even the most diffuse amplifier. It is only in France, and even there chiefly in the provinces, that they are solemnized by a fortnight's formal reunion of the respective families. Previous to the Revolution, this public exhibition of bridal blushes was an essential branch of etiquette, even among the *ancienne noblesse*; and Harriet Byron herself did not encounter a more painful display than was destined to the lovely and timid heroine of my tale.

"And where did you procure your violets, my pretty Valentine?" inquired Léon, requiring a kiss of welcome, as he drew the foster-sister of the young Countess into a recessed window of the hall.

"In the wood that hangs towards the river, Monsieur le Chevalier," replied the peasant with a low curtsy; "where I have gathered them a thousand times for you and Mademoi——Madame la Comtesse, I should say," she added, interrupting herself. "Ah! Monsieur Léon, I fear the

gay *corbeille de nœce* which the Count brought her from Paris, will not yield our young lady half the pleasure she used to feel when, every morning, I carried her the osier basket by your orders—*Voyez un peu, Monsieur, comme elle est triste et pâle, qui étoit jadis gaie comme un Pierrot, et fraîche comme une fleur.*”

“*Allons, ma petite Valentine ! discrétion je t'en prie.* The rank of your lady requires respect, and you must learn to be silent.”

“Well then, Monsieur, to return to the violets, perhaps there is some other lady in the château, who is as fond of them as Mademoiselle Estelle. To-morrow the St. Hubert is to be celebrated with the utmost splendour at Rocquigny, and the *rendezvous de Chasse* will bring you near our cottage ; so that if you will visit my poor mother and taste our *laitage*, your complaisance shall be rewarded with a bunch of the freshest flowers from the wood.”

Léon accepted the offer, when Godfrey approached, and playfully interfering, begged him

to remember that he had long considered little Valentine as his especial vassal, and that his *Droits de Seigneur* must not be invaded. "Besides, my good friend, there is Mademoiselle de Clairville waiting for her *chevalier* to conduct her to the morning's collation."

"If you will supply my place, Rocquigny," answered Léon quickly, "I will not, in that instance at least, dispute your rights. Mademoiselle de Clairville and myself have a long perspective of mutual politeness before us; and I would not anticipate the truth of the adage, '*Le mari et sa femme ne font qu'un; et je m'ennuie lorsque je suis seul.*'"

Cold levity! heartless irony! how painfully did Rochemore labour to assume their tone of indifference!—How forced were the sallies with which he felt himself compelled to divert the lady who was consigned to his powers of amusement and gallantry, by the watchful vigilance of Madame d'Olonne!

After the morning repast, the company broke

into detached groups ; and Madame d'Estrées, taking the arm of Léon, led him away from the crowded saloon to enjoy the cool air of the park, where the peasants were united to enjoy the sports of their holiday. These consisted in the usual round of rustic games ;—shooting with the cross-bow for trifling prizes ; skittles, and bowls : while under the shade of an avenue of lime-trees, a band of music gave spirit to the old, and united the groups of dancers under the active superintendence of the *Bailli* of the village.

“ How very preferable to the formal circle of the dear Baroness ;” murmured Madame d'Estrées, as she leaned upon Rochemore's arm in rapt contemplation of the scene. “ How innocent the vivacity of these rustics—yet how enlivening, after the *radotage* of the excellent Baron !”

Léon replied not—his thoughts were elsewhere ; but the little Viscountess, delighted with the side-blows she had aimed at the friends of her bosom, proceeded to direct her attacks to the rest of the family. Drawing her cachemere around her in

picturesque folds, she pointed to a *commère de village*, who was posing to her heart's content, in the centre of a knot of aged cronies who were alternately dipping into her snuff-box while they received her oracles.—“Now, pray observe yonder venerable dame; in spite of her scarlet *jupon* and kersey boddice, she exhibits far more natural grace than the *Maréchale*, whose high-breeding has been *prone*, till one is sick of the very sound. *Après tout, chevalier, puisque vous n'êtes pas de la famille, on peut avouer que cette nœce est une affaire assez maussade pour nous autres.*”

“I cannot lightly value that which procures me the advantage of supporting the *Vicomtesse d'Estrées*.”

“*Voilà qui n'est pas mal tourné pour votre âge.* But seriously speaking; I have been quite concerned for our little friend the Countess, cold and *précieuse* as she is, ever since we assisted at the signature of the marriage contract.”

Léon looked inquiringly into the face of his fair dame and gossip, and found that she wanted little encouragement to proceed.

“The situation of Monsieur d'Estrées, as governor of the province, rendered his presence desirable here; otherwise I make it a point, Monsieur de Rochemore, to keep myself above the *comméragé* of the country. *Les cancans de province ne sont guères de mon goût.* I have heard, however, that in the present instance there has been some little difficulty in bringing the young lady to a due sense of subordination. Our dear Baroness, and her *superior* mother, were above the common-place mode of education. Estelle's mind was of too refined a cast to be developed in a convent! Well,—truly they have had their reward, in the philosophic indifference with which their *élève* turned over her *écrin* to their hands, without so much as lifting the lid;—and took no earthly note of a *Corbeille* where Bertin had exhausted her art. *Moi, qui suis Parisienne, je n'en ai jamais vu d'une magnificence mieux dirigée!*

“But the Baroness, no doubt, showed herself more discerning?”

“ *Je le crois bien.* She examined the laces and embroidery with the knowing zeal of a milliner’s apprentice, and the vulgar wonder of a *financière*; and while the bride shuddered and trembled, and grew paler and paler as the legal documents were read and formalized, our dear Baroness continued to cry and laugh like a child; and flew from the Count to Estelle,—from Estelle to the *trousseau*, with the same frivolous enthusiasm.”

“ *Ce n’est pas de tout le monde qu’ on doit attendre la raison de Madame d’Estrées.*”

“ *Quant à cela, raisonnable comme une autre;* and may I never achieve the rationality of our bride, who has not once smiled since she assumed her new honours;—no! not even when she danced with her old friend and playmate, the Chevalier Léon,” continued the loquacious Viscountess, fixing her malicious little black eyes inquiringly upon Rochemore’s countenance.

“ Probably not,” answered he, returning her gaze with easy freedom, and excusing her sarcastic ill-nature in favour of the flattering in-

telligence she had unconsciously imparted ;—
“ young birds, Madame la Vicomtesse, are apt
to mope in their early days of engagement.”

Léon was interrupted by the Chevalier de Rocquigny, who had just joined the dancers, and had only left his coquettish little partner, Valentine, to whisper, “ When you can get rid of that *demi-siècle*, Rochemore, go to Clairville. He is in the billiard-room with the Commandant, and has been seeking you.”

“ For what purpose ? ”

“ Business, *family* business, I imagine,” replied Godefroi significantly, and flying back to the dance.

As soon as Léon could fasten his charge on some idler of the party, he followed the directions of the Chevalier ; not without anxiety respecting the intended communication of the Comte de Clairville. Was he about to speak to him of Estelle ? to require a cessation of their intimacy ? or had she betrayed his conversation of the preceding evening ? Before he could satisfy

the misdoubtings of his heart, he was affectionately accosted by Clairville himself, who, on observing him approach the Château, came forward to meet him; and they continued their walk towards a small bowling-green, sheltered by one of the numerous garden terraces; which by some accident had been screened from the intrusion of the guests.

“I have brought you hither, my dear Rochemore, that we may converse without observation. On a subject of so much delicacy, Chevalier, it is painful to know one’s self under the observation of a crowd.”

“Now,” thought Léon, “*now* is the blow coming, as soon as his accursed prolixity will permit.”

“You have been long aware of my anxiety to see you admitted into our family, Chevalier, by your marriage with my sister; which, according to the testamentary dispositions of your late father, has been already legally contracted.”

Léon, who knew that he held under lock and

key, a dispensation from his Holiness to dissolve the ties in question, rejoiced that his situation by the side of the Count, sheltered his confusion from observation during this preamble.

“You are also aware that my sister’s age will only exact another year’s probation, and that next summer will render my beloved friend as happy as myself.”

“Curse on his exultation,” thought Léon, as he received the pressure which Clairville, in the overflow of his heart, tenderly bestowed on his arm. “Did he bring me here only to remind me that I have the misfortune to be engaged to his sister?” and instigated by angry indignation, he longed to complete the insult he was so well prepared to offer, by an immediate rejection of the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairville. But the consciousness that such a circumstance must lead to an immediate rupture, and would consequently divide him from the society dearest to his heart, made him silent.

“But You cannot but have observed, Léon, the

delicacy of my sister's character; the shrinking modesty of Louise."

Rochemore could here conscientiously offer a glowing tribute to the virtues and charms of Mademoiselle de Clairville. The Count was delighted. "You will, therefore," he continued, "readily pardon the discrimination which has induced her to determine on returning to Clairville, after to-morrow. Under the peculiar existing circumstances, she could not with propriety remain under the same roof as yourself."

"It is to be regretted," observed Léon, "that you did not secure the Baroness and her friends from the loss of Mademoiselle de Clairville's society, by expressing her wishes on this subject; I should not have remained so long, where my presence seems unwelcome."

"You misconceive me altogether, my dear friend; Louise is, in fact, too young to be presented to the society assembled here. Her first step into the gay world should be made under the sanction of her husband. I merely wished to

explain, with the deference due to your rights, the reason of her absence."

"Would that your own was as easily secured," thought Léon, secretly loathing the ceremonious formality of his friend.

"I trust you found Louise improved in person," prosed on the Comte de Clairville, with self-contented urbanity; "although she has, perhaps, attained more energy of character,—more decision of mind, than may be altogether desirable in a wife."

"Energy—decision—Louise?" inquired the astonished Léon. "The energy of the fawn—the vigour of the dove—I should imagine."

"You are greatly mistaken. My sister under that docility of manner, that constitutional inertness, conceals a character of high resolve, of stern principle. She is capable, should the chances of her future life require it, of forming and maintaining the most severe resolutions."

"Heaven speed thy blindness!" thought the Chevalier; "she is even as cold a mixture of

earth's mould,—as passive an instrument in the hands of the mechanists of society as *thymself*." But he replied not ; for he perceived Madame d'Olonne entering the *Boulingrin* from the further end ; and the slight figure on whose arm she rested, could be none other than that of the Comtesse de Clairville herself.

Rochemore's heart fluttered even to faintness ; but there was no eluding the meeting, for the Count hastened his steps towards them, and forgetting his ordinary severity of etiquette in the tenderness of a bridegroom, he gave his arm to Estelle, leaving the Maréchale to the support of the Chevalier.

" We hoped," replied Madame d'Olonne, in reply to his inquiring looks, " that Estelle would sooner part with her head-ach in the fresh air, than in that of my chamber. She is better—much better."

Léon glanced towards the Countess, and perceived that her eyes were swollen with weeping ; nor could he but observe, that when the Count

addressed her in tones and terms of the most caressing endearment, the tears were again ready to burst forth.

"He will embrace her before my face," said Léon, in the bitterness of his soul, as he turned away to gasp for breath.

"*Quel moment délicieux! quel jour de bonheur!* How happy we all are—by what sacred bonds united!" sighed Clairville, as in walking slowly along the green avenue, he pressed the arm of his young wife, and looked for sympathy to his friend. "While thus forming one family of peace and love, we can mock the heartless enjoyments of the world, and sigh for no joys but such as lie within the contracted sphere of our existence."

It is probable that Madame d'Olonne wished to repress the expansive raptures of her young kinsman, to whom the "*science of the à propos*," was one unknown; for, instead of encouraging his ecstasies, she gaily answered, "Truly, my

good Ernest, of the three great epochs of life,—the natal—the bridal—and the burial day,—you are enjoying the brightest. Of these, *two* are devoted, by necessity, to ‘restraint even from good words;’ do not mar the happiness of the third by a clamorous triumph. Happiness is so delicate, so frail a flower, that if you but grasp its stem too closely, it loses half its fragrance,—all its bloom. Old as I am, I cannot contemplate the happy children who are sliding in the sunshine of the world, without recurring to the *refrain* of the still older song,

‘ Glissez mortels—n’appuyez pas ! ’ ”

Léon thanked her in his soul for drawing towards herself the attention of the Count; and the dinner gong fortunately sounding, summoned the little party to the house. During the whole of that evening, in spite of the music, dancing, and *petits jeux*, which dispersed the rest of the society, the young Countess remained seated by the side of Madame d’Olonne, in the midst of her family;

and the influence of her dignified sorrow, of her womanly reserve, was sufficiently strong upon the mind of Léon to restrain him from even approaching her. But with the feelings that mutually existed, this could not last. A crisis was at hand.

CHAPTER VI.

By my faith,
I joy to tread the good green woods again.
I never wander through their lone retreats
And tangled paths, but the warm tide of life
Rusheth more freely through my veins !

FRANCIS I.

Who that hath dwelt among the green vineyards and spreading forests of France, can forget the joyous clamour that ushers in the daydawn of the *St. Hubert* ?

The sharp but exciting air which invigorates the last days of autumn, the slight frost sprinkled over the crisp grass, but quickly yielding as the clear sun rises on the chill grey sky,—the yelping of the eager dogs, who read in the activity of their keepers, and the untimely stir around them, their “ note of preparation ;” the neighbouring peasantry rushing from boy to man to surround

in busy idleness the woods and forests in which the sylvan saint is about to be worshipped ; nay, even the promising din that issues from the steaming kitchen, (like that whose subterranean music arrested the steps of Prince Ricquet,) where *tête de hure, chevreuil, perdrix aux choux*, and *levreau aux olives*, attest the preceding success of the chase ;—all these are sights and sounds familiar to the provincial inhabitant of France.

As the Chevalier de Rochemore girded on the *conteau* which formed the finishing accoutrement of his hunting suit, and fastened to his sleeve a golden whistle of antique workmanship, he looked down on the court beneath his window, to admire the various steeds that stood restless and ardent, waiting the arrival of their several masters, and by the impatient tossing of their proud heads, marking their eagerness, and exciting the sympathy of the weary grooms by whom they were attended. A horn which had been blown at intervals to remind the tardy hunters that early hours are the portion of the sportsman, had served

to rouse the activity of horse and hound in due proportion. Already all were eager for the field ; and presently the grey-headed huntsman, stately and important, was seen issuing from the gateway, surrounded by a score or two of strong-built and deep-mouthed boar-hounds, such as now exist only on the animated canvas of *Sneyders*. Their natural prey is becoming, alas ! equally rare in the forests of France ; save that peculiar breed, the *sanglier solitaire*, for which the woods of Rocquigny were formerly celebrated ; and which may be found accidentally in the forests of Cressy and Orleans, or those of Lorraine or Alsace.

Two prickers completed the permanent hunting establishment of the Baron ; but they were closely followed by a group of ill-appointed assistants, in whom Léon could not fail to recognize the rabble of the village, invested for the occasion by the empty pomp of the Baron de Rocquigny, with his gorgeous livery, and mounted on the refuse of his stables ; while the *niaiserie* of

their demeanour, and their unpractised ignorance of the forms of the field, put all the rest to rout and confusion.

The ladies now came forth; the young and hardy to mount the sleek and graceful animals prepared for them; the less venturous, to lean in affected wonderment on the heavy balustrade of the court-yard; where groups of peacocks—the starry and the white intermingled—were seen in gaudy rivalry, glancing their bright necks in the sunshine; or dipping into the marble fountain, whose waters trickled unheard amid the general commotion, they raised their startled crests as some veteran hound, the worn-out companion of their daily sports, was roused for a moment to resume the energy of his race, and lifting his slow length from the hot pavement, to bay long and loudly in reply to his distant comrades.

At length the train hath gone forth; the pompous Baron marshalling the way on his heavy Norman steed; caracoling and passaging at every

turn ; and looking alternately like Marshal Tallard in the Blenheim tapestry, and the Lord Pembroke, in the frontispiece of his own work. Léon, who felt himself debarred from taking his former station at the bridle-rein of Estelle, followed the gay party but till the entrance of the forest afforded a pretext for separation ; then hastily turned towards the loneliest of those thickets, which previous habit had rendered familiar to him. As he rode away, the shout of unrepressed hilarity, the sound of

Ladies' laughter coming through the air, woke on his lips a smile of bitter derision. " Laugh on, my merry mates all," quoth he, as he galloped along ; " laugh on and prosper ! Rochemore will find his time to quell your mirth. Yea," continued he, as he shook his raised hand towards them, " the curse of withered affection, of blasted hopes, shall reach ye still."

I will not presume to analyze the nature of those thick-coming fancies, by which the mind of Léon de Rochemore was visited during his

solitary ride. The tenour of his hitherto blameless existence must lead us to trust that they were not of a texture altogether evil; yet perhaps the fearful excesses of after life, the horrors into which time and national degradation betrayed his maturer years, might be remotely traced to the lonely instigations of the forest of Rocquigny.

I cannot bring myself to believe, that the mind of even the most brutal malefactor is marked by *early* corruption. Although we are taught to know ourselves "the children of wrath and born in sin," *for* sin surely none was ever marked by nature. The innocence of childhood, the reckless buoyancy of youthful spirits must oppose the possibility of deliberate wickedness, of "malice aforethought," even in those whose crimes may thereafter insure to them a violent and ignominious end.

None are *all* evil;

and from examples of common occurrence in private life, it would seem that the mind of man, *the human soul*,—is susceptible of decadence and

corruption at uncertain stages of its being, even as the human body is subjected to infirmities and disease. Many of the most gifted individuals are said to have given no sign of their intellectual endowments during their youth ; and many of the most heinous criminals are said to have been remarkable for the purity of their early existence. Is it not, therefore, desirable to believe that the mind may be visited at different seasons by temptations and suggestions which the strength of its moral and religious principles is insufficient to subdue, rather than that the germ of sin may be concealed in unsuspected secrecy for years ?

An eminent Englishman is said to have observed, as he stood contemplating the sports of the Eton playground, “ How grievous to think that these fine lads will become stupid members of parliament ! ” I have often thought that even those atrocious leaders of the French Revolution, whose names have become accursed among the nations, and are now “ festering in the infamy of years,” would *themselves* have shrunk with

horror, could the record of their future crimes have been unfolded to their eyes, in their days of boyish sportfulness. Even they—even Robespierre—Marat—Lebon—Carrier—Barère—even those quaffers of human blood, who are vulgarly judged as having been born for reprobation, must have passed through their season of infantine purity, of youthful innocence! Mothers must have wept over their cradles—and the smiles of female beauty touched their young hearts with enthusiasm. Yet the leprosy of the evil times on which they had fallen soon infected their hearts, and the healing hand of faith repelled not its progress.

Do we not, therefore, grossly err in avoiding the society of the young? in undervaluing the importance of those who are but stepping over the threshold of the world? We exclaim “he is so young—his principles are unsettled—he knows not of what he is talking;” or, “she is a mere child, it is useless to argue with her.” Yet the *boy* we despise may shortly become the

founder of unknown systems,—the leader of a faction,—the ruling spirit of a rising colony,—the instigator of the errors of a mighty nation!—The *girl* may rule by her ascendancy the most powerful of our lawgivers, may bring shame, by her weakness, on the most ancient of our houses!—Despise not, then, the young;—’tis by them that the world which thy children must inhabit shall be swayed!

“Something too much,”—*far* too much of this! Yet I have been led into the discussion solely as a ground of apology for any inconsistency that may be detected in the character of Léon de Rochemore. I have been willing to avoid the common error of deepening the tints of my portrait till its features become undistinguishable. I have described the early days of my hero as unsullied by evil; and although, in his closing years, his crimes became the by-word of society, yet I verily believe that in the hardened desperado I must exhibit,

The mother that him bare,
She had not known her child!

It was nearly noon on the *Fête St. Hubert*, when the gaudy holiday suit of Valentine was seen glancing among the bushes, as she presented her fragrant offering of flowers to the young Chevalier. He had lingered by the river side to wait her coming ; and as they took together the tangled path towards her mother's cottage, they were alarmed by shouts from various parts of the wood. As they reached the road, a pricker of Monsieur de Rocquigny's Chasse passed them at full gallop, exclaiming, " Help, for the lady, she is killed !"—and was immediately followed by Clairville himself, riding distractedly towards the castle.

Léon rushed forwards in breathless agitation ; and a few hundred yards from the spot, he perceived the inanimate form of a female lying on the grass.—Another, with her back turned towards his approaching footsteps, was kneeling by her side ; and several grooms were holding horses in the back ground. Persuaded that the lifeless body was that of Madame de Clairville,

Léon dashed himself to the earth beside it ; calling on her in terms of expressive tenderness to live and bless him.

Raising her in his arms, he addressed her as his beloved Estelle ; when to his consternation the pallid countenance of Mademoiselle de Clairville met his view, and her eyes slowly unclosed to gaze upon him. Startled out of all self-possession, he instantly let her fall to the earth ; and, turning rapidly to the kneeling form beside him, he snatched the hand of the living Estelle to his lips, and kissed it again and again, as he laughed with hysteric agony. Then roused to a sense of the madness of his conduct, he once more turned to the suffering Louise, and, having aided the anxious efforts of the Countess for her recovery, he assisted to bear her to the cottage of Valentine.

Mademoiselle de Clairville having been merely stunned by a fall from her horse, soon recovered sufficiently to re-assure her friends ; and begged that she might be left to the restoration of perfect repose, till the arrival of the carriage which her

brother was seeking at the Château to remove her. "Leave me, Estelle," she whispered; "I have much, *much* need to compose my thoughts;" and Madame de Clairville was unwillingly compelled to quit the humble chamber. Valentine and her mother were too busily employed in preparing restoratives in the interior of the cottage to render their observation dangerous; and Léon taking from his bosom the flowers he had prepared, placed them in the resisting hand of the Comtesse de Clairville, as she retreated towards the garden door.

"Forgive me," he whispered, "forgive the excesses of a heart bewildered by a shock so terrible as that I but now experienced. Forgive me, Estelle, for I was visited beyond my powers of endurance. I thought—I *believed*—that I had rather seen thee in thy grave than in thy bridal garments; yet when I beheld thee taken from us by a violent death, I had no power to suppress the agony of my soul."

“ I would I were dead indeed,” said the Countess in a voice broken by tears, “ so that I might be spared the degradation of hearing these professions—the misery of daily beholding thine unchanged affection. Nay—so help me, God !” she exclaimed, throwing her arms upward in reckless anguish, “ I *will* rather die than bear about me a heart dishonoured by hourly duplicity, and torn by thine unforbearing persecution. Go from me, Léon ! it is not for thee to breathe by my side ;—it is not for me to listen to thy words !—I bear the name of an honourable husband, the soul of an honourable race ; and neither shall be sullied by my shame. Go from me, Léon ! I was not born to be a castaway—and no past affection can license the cruel power which thou seekest to assume over me !”

“ Not so, dearest,” replied Rochemore in a tone of the humblest depression ; “ I seek for nothing at thy hands save compassion. Take these flowers, Estelle. Keep them, not as of old,

in pledge of a first and unsullied affection ;—not now as a token of fearless constancy ; but as a remembrance of the sorrow thou hast inflicted, and of the pure, the enduring devotion with which my soul waits on thy will. In what do I infringe on the rights of Clairville,—in what do I endanger *thy* happiness, Estelle ? Nay, my beloved, turn not from me—nor bend thy brow in anger—I mean no evil, and therefore I have none to fear.”

Longer he might have spoken, and longer might the unhappy Countess have listened to the dangerous soothing of his delusive words, when the sound of coming wheels announced the approach of Monsieur de Clairville ; and the removal of Louise immediately occupied the general attention.

Rochemore, as he slowly followed the cavalcade which bore the young sufferer to the Château, could not but accuse himself of savage coldness towards her ; and in remembering the smile of grateful delight with which she had recognized

him bending over her in the first moment of returning consciousness, he thought with regret on his estranged feelings. He even trusted, that at some future time his heart might be schooled to fulfil his early engagements. But fate had decreed otherwise.

CHAPTER VII.

It is a duty which I owe
To thine—to thee—to man—to God!
To crush, to quench, this guilty glow,
Ere yet the path of crime be trod.

BYRON.

NEITHER Madame d'Olonne nor the Comtesse de Clairville appeared at the dinner table, and their absence was naturally attributed to their attendance on the suffering Louise. In the brilliant accession of guests insured by the celebration of the St. Hubert, they were scarcely missed at the noisy board of the Baron;—for all were absorbed in their own individual interests and vanities. The heroes of the chase were busily employed in recounting their miraculous exploits of the morning, and in commemorating the unsportsmanlike bearing of the absent; while the

ladies were seeking to exhibit, with apparent unconcern, the characteristic costumes they had assumed in honour of the high festival of the day. Some with crescents on their fair brows,—some with bugles slung across their shoulders;—others with the spotted deer-skin wrapt around their delicate figures,—and each and all disfiguring, by some misplaced emblem of the chase, the elegance of their usual attire.

From the gallery of the state dining room, there pealed a clamorous din of *cors de chasse*, which rendered all conversation fruitless. But between the pauses of their joyous music, some words of a confidential communication between the Baroness and her friend Madame d'Estrées, reached the ear of Léon, who was seated near them, and excited in his mind the most painful anxiety. "The depressed state of the dear Countess's mind,"—"dangerous *état*,"—"mortifying preference of my mother,"—"early attachment,"—were the detached sentences that perplexed him, during the intervals of a dissertation

between d'Estrées and the Baron, on the difference of culture between the vines of the eastern and western banks of the Rhine.

As soon as the party rose from table, I dare not record at how early an hour, Rochemore determined on seeking the apartments of the Maréchale ; to which, during his frequent visits at the Château, he had never yet been honoured by an invitation. The excitement of the hurried events of the morning, the wine which had recently increased the agitation of his mind, admitted of no pause, no discretion in his movements,—but forbidding him to hope for rest, urged him to rush upon further tumult and agitation as a respite from present suffering.

He readily found his way to the suite of chambers devoted to the exclusive use of the Maréchale d'Olonne ; and had he doubted their identity, one glance upon the venerable servants who rose on his entrance into the vestibule,—one look around the elegant but unostentatious chamber into which he was ushered, would have

assured him that he had not mistaken his road. The wearisome length of stair he had found himself compelled to ascend, had induced him to marvel on his way that so elevated a story had been selected for the domicile of a person of the Maréchale's advanced years. The probability that she wished to place herself above the continual intrusion of her family, and the tumult of the Château, suggested itself as a motive for the choice; but when Léon stepped from the open windows upon a lofty stone balcony, commanding a view over a vast extent of varying landscape, upon which the setting sun of autumn now streamed in richest splendour;—when he felt the pure air, that seemed freshened by the river, the flow of whose waters, far below, was unheard in the dizzy height from which he gazed;—when he looked upon the mighty expanse of glorious sky which the far horizon yielded to his admiration, he no longer wondered at the selection of an abode where “Heaven's breath smelt so wooingly.”

Lost in contemplation of the scene around, he waited in vain for the appearance of the Maréchale, who had been apprized in an inner chamber of his visit. He grew at length impatient, and thought he distinguished the sound of suppressed grief, of affectionate solicitation, within; but as he stood perplexed and irresolute, the door opened, and the Maréchale entered with her usual sedateness of demeanour, yet with an air of more than common severity; and pointing to a seat at some distance, she placed herself in her own especial *fauteuil*. The cold formality she assumed, the uninviting indifference of her reception, so completely discomposed Monsieur de Rochemore, that he could not utter a word in excuse for his intrusion. He had expected, he had trusted, to find her indignant, and disposed to remonstrance, and then he might have found an occasion to unburthen his heart; but her ungracious stateliness rendered her far more inaccessible.

At length, satisfied with the confusion she

had excited, she looked up from a new work, of which she had been deliberately cutting open the pages, and calmly demanded to what she was indebted for the honour of his company.

Léon was now irritated beyond endurance, and starting up, he exclaimed "It is that I am resolved to be informed, Madame la Maréchale, by what misfortune I have forfeited all claim to your indulgence, or rather to the common politeness of society. From the first ill-starred moment in which I became known to your family, you were pleased to mark me out for indignity and persecution ; and now, even on an occasion of family rejoicing, you cannot sufficiently command your feelings to secure me from fresh insult."

Madame d'Olonne listened to this *boutade* with calmness and a slight expression of surprise, and replied, "Since you have chosen, sir, to make this indelicate appeal, and to require an explanation from a woman, whose age and position should render her respectable in your eyes,—and that

too in the peremptory tone which had been more becoming were it addressed to a man, *your equal*, I have no hesitation in replying to your questions. From the hour in which you entered this house, Monsieur de Rochemore, I observed you with a close and jealous scrutiny ; for the beauty of your person, and your showy accomplishments, rendered you, to my feelings, a dangerous inmate in the home of my grandchild ! I soon remarked, with increasing mistrust, that you were a mere worldling,—a scoffer at all things good and holy ; and from your utter want of principle, I anticipated that which ensued,—your seduction of Estelle's affections, in whom you should have beheld, in sacred trust, the future wife of your friend. With even yet more wayward fickleness than I had expected at your hands, you deserted her side in a critical hour. In that hour, my counsels—my prayers prevailed ; Estelle returned to her dutiful allegiance ; and contracted those honourable engagements which were destined to her from her childhood. I was once more happy,

Monsieur de Rochemore ; I was enjoying, in blessed calm, my child's security from future evil, when, like a spirit of mischief, you re-appeared among us !

“ Yes !” continued the Maréchale, her cheek flushing with unwonted energy, “ you came hither in the wantonness of malice, to blight those bridal flowers which had begun to assume fairness and grace in the sight of Estelle. You pursued her even to persecution ;—and the most sacred day of her existence was polluted by your cruel importunities. And now, sir,—even now, you are profiting by your artful influence over the mind of a credulous husband, a confiding mother, to keep your unsuspected station by her side, and to instil into her pure heart the pestilent principles of your own. But,” she continued, looking stedfastly upon him, “ while I breathe, no power—no effort—no watchfulness shall be spared to circumvent your designs ;—while I live, Monsieur de Rochemore, your victory is but half achieved.”

Léon, whose fury had been gradually enkindled

during this explanation, now found it impossible to repress his feelings. "It is well, madam," said he, drawing near to the Maréchale, and gazing upon her with looks of deep and bitter hatred,—his voice lowered to the deadliest pitch of intense passion,—his lips pale with suppressed rage,—his limbs trembling with inward emotion;—"it is well, thou utter, thou polished hypocrite! It was thy belief of my want of principle, thy knowledge of my youthful errors, sayest thou, that rendered thee mine enemy? False—false interpretation! Did not the broad lands of Clairville,—did not the higher honors of his station,—did not the vain promptings of thy heartless ambition tempt thee to oppose the dawning tenderness of my Estelle? Yea—it was this; it was thy dread of the paltry clamours of society, thine awe of the interpretation of thy own vain-glorious *coterie*, that urged thee to blight the first affections of two innocent hearts, and to destroy the hopes of thine unoffending victims. Be it so! the curse of my withered soul be on thy head!—

and by the agony of my heart, I devote thee and thine,—I devote this house and household, to execration and anguish! *Let them live in misery, and die in shame!*”

As he spoke he raised his clenched hand to Heaven, to give force to his horrible imprecation; and his venerable auditress was awed by the superhuman energy which appeared to inspire him. The terrible beauty of his knit brows and towering figure, might have imaged forth the idea of the fallen son of light blaspheming the Maker, whose laws he had presumed to outrage! But ere that hand descended to smite the swelling heart which urged his angry upbraiding, a faint shriek was heard from the inner chamber; and before Madame d'Olonne could intercept his passage, Léon had rushed to the couch on which the unhappy Countess reclined, and kneeling by her side, he wept aloud on the hand he pressed within his own; while the Maréchale stood near them in painful dismay. “Listen to me,” he cried; “Estelle, beloved Estelle, listen to thy fondest,

thy firmest friend. These ties, these forced and unnatural ties, avail as nothing in the sight of Heaven. In them, the heart whose warm affections are Heaven's best gift, was permitted to exercise no choice ; and by that heart, by those precious affections, I conjure thee, my beloved, to renounce thy vain submission to the tyranny of others ! These skies, Estelle, are not those where the sun shines brightest ; there is a world beyond yon sullen seas where we may yet be happy !”

He spoke, but Madame de Clairville replied not ;—she still lay extended on the couch in cold and inanimate exhaustion. Her hunting dress of the morning was torn open at the throat to admit air ; and her hair, which had burst from the ribbon that had confined her glossy tresses for the chace, was lying around her in dishevelled luxuriance. But the brow from which it hung was deathly, and white as the purest marble ; and the quivering lips that essayed to speak only moved in fruitless effort. She was sensible, however,

to the words of Léon, for the large tears gathered in her eyes as he spake, and rolled slowly down her cold cheeks.

“Now, woe is me!” exclaimed Madame d’Olonne, throwing herself into a chair, and wringing her hands. “How must I have offended against God, to be so sorely visited in my age—to behold my innocent child thus torn from my heart before my face. Spare her,” said she, scarce conscious of what she did, and turning with uplifted hands towards the Chevalier; “spare her, Léon de Rochemore, for she is the blessing of many bosoms,—the hope—the joy of many. Oh! who shall say what glad tears of welcome were shed upon her cradle?—who can tell what doating love watched over her childhood? All our hearts were hers,—*are* hers! Prosperity hath been upon her all the days of her young life;—her destiny is even now marked out for future honour and happiness; and oh! seek not to bring shame upon it by the gratification of thy lawless will!—I am old,” she continued ex-

tending her clasped hands towards her startled auditor; "I am approaching my home of everlasting rest, Monsieur de Rochemore, and I charge thee that thou hasten not my departing footsteps. So shall mine uplifted voice bless thee in my dying hour—and the prayer of a parting Christian may something avail thee in thy day of retribution!"

Léon was deeply impressed by this unguarded emotion in one who had never before given him occasion to note the slightest trace of human weakness; he was about, however, to reply, when the Countess who had been gathering strength during her grandmother's affecting appeal, raised herself upon the couch, and extended her arms affectionately towards the Maréchale: "Do you so little know me, best and kindest friend," said she, "as to dread my weakness in this exigence? Fear not for me, nor cease, I pray you, to regard me with love and confidence. If I have been hitherto misled by a dangerous predilection in favour of this man, the events of to-day

would have restored me to myself. I own that I have looked upon him with interest—with the tenderest compassion, for I knew that his misplaced affection had alone brought him back to my feet. But that compassion, that interest was excited by confidence in his generosity, his delicacy of feeling, his disinterested forbearance ;—and how hath he justified my partial estimation of his character ? His importunate declarations have deeply wounded a heart he might have learned to spare ; his bold assiduities have compromised my character, and endangered the peace of his friend, my husband. And thou, my kind, my respected monitress,” she exclaimed, folding Madame d’Olonne to her heart, “how hath he presumed to vilify and revile thee !”

She rose as she uttered these last words, and gently, yet firmly, confronted her agitated lover. “If I have spoken harshly, Rochemore, forgive me ! for as Heaven shall judge me hereafter, these are the last words that shall pass between us ; and I would that we might part in peace. Fare

thee well, Léon ;—by the love thou hast borne me,—by the memory of thy mother,—I charge thee to leave this place. Say, art thou willing to obey me ?”

The Chevalier struck by the calm decision of her manner, and satisfied by his knowledge of her character of her perfect sincerity, turned towards the window to conceal his emotion as he assured her that her will should be his law.

“ It is well—it is kindly determined,” she replied, leaning heavily on the arm of Madame d’Olonne ; “ so shall we both be spared from evil to come. Farewell, then,”—said the Countess, placing her trembling hand in that of Léon. “ In some future hour I shall trust to find in thee a firm and assured friend:—till then, all peace be with thee.”—

The Chevalier de Rochemore had ridden many miles from the Château de Rocquigny, before he could sufficiently recover to believe in the reality of his dream. But when he became restored to the sober certainty of existence, he felt

that all was past, all absolutely ended ; that no return, no renewed importunities would replace him in the affections of Madame de Clairville. Her reproaches had sunk deeply into his mind ;— he suffered, as it was fitting he should suffer, long and bitterly. But even with this last blow his afflictions were not destined to end ; and his future mortifications were appointed to spring from a source that he had hitherto little apprehended.

CHAPTER VIII.

When every tongue thy follies named,
I fled the unwelcome story,
Or found, in e'en the faults they blamed,
Some gleams of future glory!
I still was true, when nearer friends
Conspired to wrong, to slight thee ;—
The heart that now thy falsehood rends,
Would then have bled to right thee !
But go—deceiver ! go,
Some day, perhaps, thou'lt waken
From pleasure's dream, to know
The grief of hearts forsaken !

MOORE.

It was some weeks after the return of the Chevalier de Rochemore to Paris, that a letter was placed in his hands, subscribed in fair and feminine writing, which for a moment he trusted might prove that of the Comtesse de Clairville ; but the signature of *Louise* soon undeceived his expectations. It ran as follows :—

“ You will be surprised to receive a letter from one who has hitherto foreborne, from motives

of delicacy, to address her affianced bridegroom ; and still more so, when I assure you that this *first* will be the *last* that shall ever pass between us. Before you receive it, I shall be already an accepted daughter of the *Lord Jesus* ; and I trust to your delicacy and honest feeling to oppose no obstacle to my vocation.

“ I was brought up, as you well know, from my childhood, with the certainty of becoming your wife ; I was taught to admire and to love you. I *did* admire,—I did most truly love you ; for there can be no longer shame in making this confession, since the veil of the sanctuary hath fallen between us. I learned betimes to place my pride in your well-doing ; and the voice of general approval sanctified the earnest confidence of my heart. When we met, I observed that you still regarded me as a mere child ; and by this I was nothing grieved ; for would it have served me that you should be aware how fondly that child cherished the sentiments of a woman ? I was happy even in your absence ; for the talents I was called

upon to cultivate, would, I knew, be hereafter devoted to your amusement : I was happy, how happy ! in your presence ; for the slightest notice you vouchsafed, appeared too rich a reward for one so lowly,—so unattractive as myself ! But all these feelings, Chevalier, have latterly been changed to very bitterness ; with the jealousy of true affection, I was the first to detect the nature of your sentiments for Estelle de Rocquigny. Yet long and fervently I trusted that better feelings would arise, and urge you to subdue an involuntary passion ; and your absence suddenly appeared to confirm my hopes. While all beside were grieving for your return, I alone, Monsieur de Rochemore, exulted in secret pride over the honourable prudence of your flight.

“ How grievously did my heart misgive me on your unexpected return ! They told me—blind flatterers ! that it was for *me* you were come ; but I witnessed your meeting with the bride, and my heart was cruelly undeceived. Still—still I fondly and vainly believed that all this evil was about to end ; when your indifference towards

myself, expressed with such unmanly cruelty on the occasion of my accident in the forest, swept from my heart every trace of gentler feelings in your favour. From that hour have I been bent on dissolving the ties between us, without compromising the reputation of my dear and innocent sister ; and so surely have I taken my measures, that I have nothing further to fear, save from your angry tenacity of rights, which I truly believe to be as hateful to you as to myself.

“ You will tell me, perhaps, that there are other alternatives than a cloister, or a marriage with one to whom I am become loathsome as a pestilence, but it is not for *you* to speak of this ; for I feel that I was destined from my infancy to be your’s only,—and the bride of none other will I be. Such a change would be pollution !

“ Farewell, then, Rochemore ! Be generous, and pursue me not ; but rather turn your thoughts to the extirpation of those evil passions which have lately obtained the mastery of your heart. Farewell for ever.

“ LOUISE DE CLAIRVILLE.”

On a first perusal of Mademoiselle de Clairville's extraordinary communication, the Chevalier de Rochemore was inclined to refer it to the mere suggestions of girlish pique. But letters from several branches of the Clairville family shortly followed that of Louise, announcing her retirement into a convent; and advising him on account of the publicity that she had voluntarily drawn upon her proceedings, to refrain from all violent measures for her recovery. From her brother he received a more detailed account of her intentions, which the Comte de Clairville hesitated not to attribute to her distaste for the union to which she was destined. He even glanced at the possibility that some slight or ungracious bearing on the part of the Chevalier de Rochemore had prompted her rash and uncounselled measures; and ended by seriously adjuring him to oppose no obstacle to her wishes, should anything have recently occurred to lessen his inclination for the marriage.

Léon, although deeply mortified that the rejec-

tion he had so long meditated should be thrown upon himself, replied that he was perfectly contented to acquiesce in Mademoiselle de Clairville's measures; and to satisfy her that she had nothing to fear from molestation on his part, he inclosed a legal renunciation of his rights. He concluded by begging to be spared all further communication on the subject, as he was on the point of sailing for America; and in this declaration he was sincere, for a few days afterwards, a merchant vessel from Hâvre de Grâce bore him to the United States.

Shortly after his departure the young sister of the Comte de Clairville confirmed her intentions by taking the veil; notwithstanding the earnest entreaties of Estelle, who would have persuaded her to dwell with her brother in sisterly companionship; and the still warmer solicitations of the Rocquignys, who implored her to strengthen their family connexion by a marriage with Godefroi. But although she was well aware of the situation with which he had long regarded her,

she firmly declined every overture of alliance and terminated all discussion on the subject by hastily pronouncing her vows.

This event so warmly interested the feelings of Estelle and her friends, that the mysterious departure of the Chevalier de Rochemore passed as of secondary note ; and in the busy occupations, and sincere devotion of a wife, the Comtesse de Clairville found no effort requisite to obliterate the remembrance of past feelings. If any thought of her early weakness passed for a moment through her heart, it only urged her to turn with redoubled zeal to the assiduous performance of her duties ; and to increase her affectionate cares for the aged relative by whose indulgent counsels she had been enlightened. It was her wish, as well as that of the Comte de Clairville, to pass the greater part of her time on his own estates ; and his appointment to the governorship of the province, upon the decease of Monsieur d'Estrées, confirmed this judicious determination. In the cheerful retirement of a beloved home, she found

leisure to mature those talents which had been abused by a neglected education ; and at length she was happy in adding to her occupations the endearing task of watching over the infancy of a son. Thus rich in the gifts of earthly prosperity, —thus contented,—thus loving and beloved,—how little did Estelle de Clairville anticipate the accumulated horrors which were destined to fulfil the curse that had been poured upon her head !

In the course of a few years, the death of the Baroness de Rocquigny, and the imbecile conduct of her widowed son-in-law, rendered the Château an unsatisfactory abode for the aged Maréchale, whose calm disposition and reasonable habits had prolonged her span of life beyond that of her dissipated and intemperate daughter ; and resisting the anxious claims of Estelle, she settled herself in a suit of apartments appertaining to the convent of St. Antoine, at Paris. There, surrounded by a chosen society formed of the
nant of her youth's companions, and the most

distinguished literary characters of the day, the old lady dreamed away the sober winter of her years ;—happy in the esteem of all around her—happy in the well-doing and respectability of her grandchildren—and only uneasy in the public disturbances, which now began to agitate the kingdom of France ; and which led her to apprehend that she might live to repine at the length of days which Providence had assigned her.

CHAPTER IX.

It might some wonder move
How these together could have talked of love.

CRABBE.

IN passing abruptly to a more distant period of the history of the Comtesse de Clairville, I am willing to omit those uneventful records of a peaceful domestic life, which, although perhaps they offer the fairest ensample of human happiness, are sufficiently wearisome in the recital. I shall, therefore, say nothing of the ten years that succeeded the stormy epoch of her marriage, except that they passed but too rapidly over her head ; and the reader is requested, without the aid of mandragora, “ to dream away that lapse of time.”

Of the Chevalier de Rochemore, during the same period, little was known among his friends

in Europe, except that he had become a prosperous settler in Louisiana, and was apparently absorbed in the gigantic agricultural schemes in which he had embarked his fortunes. It was understood that he was regarded with respect and consideration among those whom he had adopted as countrymen; and that no lingering attachments or early prejudices appeared at any time to urge his return to the land of his ancestors.

It is scarcely, however, to be imagined, that the important events which began, about this period, to attach the eyes both of the Old and New World, upon the political proceedings of France, could fail to interest the feelings of one who had been nurtured in her bosom—who had eaten of her bread, and drank of her cup; and it was probably a secret concern for the destinies of his native country, which induced Monsieur de Rochemore to place his affairs in the hands of an efficient agent, and proceed to Europe, a few months previous to the assembling of the States

General. The ostensible motive, however, which called him to France, was the death of his maternal uncle, the Comte de Mérangères; to whose title and estates he succeeded by right of inheritance, and the arrangement of whose affairs required his immediate superintendence.

On the arrival of the new Count in Paris, one of his earliest inquiries regarded the Clairville family; with whom, since the rupture of his marriage, he had entertained no communication. The intelligence he now received of the obscure monotony of their provincial existence, and of the retirement of the Maréchale d'Olonne, produced a smile of contempt upon features which, in acquiring the stern and reflective character of maturity, had gained an expression of haughty disdain, equally austere and malignant. "Poor Estelle," he murmured, "poor *feéble* puppet!—*thou* to be made a mere homely, household drudge! such, such was not the lofty destiny I had marked out for thee!—And the courtly old sycophant has drivelled into the established dotage of her

caste, and vibrates between approving herself a *dévoté* or a *precieuse* ! Well—well—no matter : Satan will find his prey under any mask.”

By some unfortunate accident, or rather through the connections induced by similarity of views and feelings, Monsieur de Mérangères, on his appearance in Paris, became a frequent guest at the Palais Royal ; and after an intimacy of some months’ duration, he was invited to accompany the Duc d’Orléans on a tour of pleasure through Great Britain. It is easy to conceive that the tendency of his Royal Highness’s precepts and example, which have since acquired a fatal notoriety, served neither to soften the feelings, nor subdue the rising ambition of the Count. The great command of funds afforded him by his recent succession, rendered him a valuable proselyte in the estimation of the Orléans party ; and accordingly neither pains nor adulation were spared to win him to their standard.

It is not my intention to enter here into any details of the progress or character of the French

Revolution. The time and labour I have bestowed upon the subject in a work which I may not at present presume to publish, have rendered it most flat and unprofitable to my feelings; and I am anxious to proceed to the melancholy conclusion of a tale which could derive no additional interest from such a digression.

Yet, although I may *now* venture to revert to the period in question, as having become one of exhausted interest, yet it is scarcely credible that the march of events which led to this most awful crisis of modern times, should have been passed over with the apathy and unconcern with which they were *at the time* regarded by the French nation. Even while the tempest was gathering over their heads, even after the first dread bolts of destruction had fallen among them, the people of Paris abated little of their frivolous levity. The immediate followers of the court were induced, it is true, to suspend for a season the luxurious dissipation by which they had pampered the taste of the unfortunate Marie An-

toinette; but throughout the kingdom, and even in Paris itself, feastings and riotous merriment,—and marrying and giving in marriage proceeded without interruption, even while the axe of the executioner was thirsting for the blood of the thoughtless actors of the drama.

Soon after the return of the Comte de Méran-gères from England, he chanced to be an invited guest at a splendid fête given by Monsieur de Montenay, the son of the celebrated *fermier-général*, at a château he had recently purchased in the Vallée de Montmorency. Late in the evening, the Count entered a magnificent gallery, leading to the great saloon, where the principal part of the company was engaged with the representation of a *pièce d'occasion*, composed by Marmontel himself; who was at that moment *l'enfant gâté de la cour et de la ville*.

Unwilling to disturb his fair hostess by entering at so unseasonable a moment, he lounged negligently along the gallery, on the arm of the Duc de Brissac, listening to his enthusiastic en-

comiums of some new *proverbe* of Carmontelle, “*qui faisoit fureur* ;” and mingling at times in the conversation of the brilliant groups of guests who loitered in the gallery, in order to avoid the necessity of forced attention to an indifferent vaudeville, worse than indifferently performed.

“ Who is that lovely creature in the *ponceau* tunic, seated near the door ?” inquired one of those who had ventured near the entry of the saloon.

“ Any thing new ?” asked the Duc de Brissac.

“ Quite new,” replied another of the idlers ; “ a fair *provinciale*, I understand ; but certainly free from the *niaiserie* of her calling.”

“ By Heavens !” exclaimed the Chevalier de Boufflers, “ she is the breathing divinity of Raphael’s canvas ;—the triumphant Galatea of Rome herself !”

“ Indeed !” replied M^{er}angères, diverted by his vehemence ; “ and how may so classical a fair one be named in modern times ?”

“ Oh ! ’tis the wife of some *Seigneur Châtelain*,

who has been hunted from his strong hold in the Cévennes by the unquiet spirit of his vassals.—The *canaille* have been pleased to illuminate his dreary winter evenings by the bonfires of a château or two in his neighbourhood ; so he has wisely brought his fair phoenix to be consumed on a less barbarous pile !—Clermont—Clairville—yes, the Comte de Clairville.”

Mérangères felt the blood rush to his temples at the sound ; and a deathly sickness overcame him for a moment. As soon as he could escape from his lively companions, he hastily left the gallery, and descending a flight of marble steps, found himself alone in the enchanting gardens of Montenay, already fragrant with the first burst of spring.

“ This weakness is degrading—is contemptible indeed,” exclaimed he, as he strove to regain his ordinary mastery over his feelings. “ Have I dwelt an exile in a distant country,—have I involved my mind in all the factitious interests of avarice and ambition,—have I schooled my soul

in the most abstract contemplations of philosophy, to be thus overset at the mere sound of her name? Important interests are stirring around me,—the energies of a mighty nation are wakening from their fatal inaction,—the destiny of the great and proud is fashioning in awful mystery beneath their unconscious observation;—and shall I yield the command of my feelings, at *such* a moment, to a poor weak woman? Fie on me! for truly I am unworthy the high calling which is set before me.”

After some time spent in musing among the flowery *treillages*, and fragrant *bosquets* of the gardens, Mérangères approached to re-enter the house. By the glaring light of the illumination within, he could perfectly discern the interior of the lower range of apartments, without being himself distinguished by those who were the objects of his observation; and in returning towards the great entrance, he was induced to pause near the shaded windows of a splendid boudoir.

All that could sense or eye delight
Seemed gathered in that gorgeous room;

but it was not the eastern elegance of its hangings which arrested the steps of the Count. He stood to contemplate the graceful proportions of a female form, upon which the eyes of all present were admiringly fixed. She was seated on an ottoman, by the side of the dignified Madame de Mirepoix ; and the Comtesse Amélie de Boufflers, fair as the lily's whiteness, was indolently reclining by her side. The Chevalier was leaning over the rival beauties, and exerting all his conversational powers for their entertainment ; while a group of fashionable admirers near them seconded the efforts of his wit and gallantry. As the idol of the circle, who was habited in a sumptuous oriental costume, turned her head to enjoy the freshness of the open window, she discovered to the astonished gaze of Monsieur de Mérangères, a beautiful and radiant resemblance of the features of his beloved Estelle !

But could it be her indeed ?—Could the girlish fragility, the almost infantine delicacy of the young Countess's person have expanded into this

glow of luxuriant loveliness? Could she have acquired, in her sober retirement, this superhuman intelligence of brow,—this graceful dignity of demeanour? He was determined to resolve his doubts; and entering the boudoir, he whispered a request to the Duc de Lauzun that he might be presented to “the Cynthia of the minute;”—bowing with deep and unaffected gallantry as the Duke immediately named him to the lovely stranger, as the *Comte de Mérangères*. For some minutes, the Countess, in pursuing the previous strain of conversation, and unexcited by the sound of a name unknown to her, yielded no especial notice to the new arrival; but her attention was soon drawn towards him by a striking illustration of her own opinion, uttered in the low deep tone, which, although long unheard, could not fail to reach her heart. She gazed inquiringly upon his face; and half-rising from her seat, she whispered in breathless emotion, “*Léon—Rochemore ! est-ce bein toi que je reconnois !*”

The mutual agitation which attended this strange

recognition excited no little surprise in the polished circle of which the Countess formed a part. “*Ré-tirons nous, mon ami,*” murmured Lauzun to the Chevalier de Boufflers, “*nous voilà de trop.* After all, we shall make nothing of our little provincial goddess;—no tact,—no self-possession, none whatever !”

“ She is hardly *posée* enough at present, certainly,” said Boufflers, casting an inquiring look behind, as he left the boudoir : “ but I own I like her the better for the touch of nature that betrays her into these *naïvetés* ; one is so seldom startled by any thing like originality in this vile world of refinement.”

“ *Il me semble que tu es difficile, mon cher Chevalier,*” said Lauzun, as arm in arm they entered the saloon ; “ *en fait d’originaux tu as, ce soir même, à choisir. Voilà le Lovelace du dernier siècle,—l’invalidé de Cythère—Monsieur Walpole en habit gris de lin, qui cherche à faire valoir les pêches et le raisin de son Château de Strabéri ; quoiqu’il soit reconnu, qu’on ne possède pour fruit*

mur en Angleterre, que des pommes cuites ! Now what can exceed the exquisite absurdity of this *philosophe malgré lui* ; who is only allured to Paris by the cajoling flatteries of *one* old woman,* and who affects to be bent on a pilgrimage to the shrine of another,—*Notre dame de Livry*, as he has affectedly baptized my grand aunt de Sévigné.”

“ But is it true that you have imposed a lock of little Manon’s hair upon his blind enthusiasm, as a tress of Madame de Grignan’s *belle chevelure* ?”

“ False—false on my word !—Do you think I would so far dishonour my ancestry ? Believe me, I cut the auburn ringlet myself from the pure mane of my Mecklenburg pony. *Mais silence*—here are the stiff-necked wife and learned daughter of our Genevese *maitre de finance*. *Positivement ces beaux yeux là méritent une toilette mieux soignée*. Now what can be more amusingly original than her public exhibition of filial devotion—or the air of magnanimity she assumes, when

* Madame du Deffand.

she calls herself ‘ the daughter of Necker ?’
Prythee, come and assist me to mystify her by a
few rants in honour of her Evander !”

So lightly are the idols of posterity held by their
cotemporaries ; and so true it is “ *qu’on n’est
j’aurais prophète ni dans son pays, ni dans son
siècle !*”

From the very hour which restored the Comte
de Mérangères to the society of his former friends,
his habits of life appeared to have received a new
impulse. The circles of fashion—the theatres—
the coteries of the idle and magnificent—were now
his constant haunts ; nor did he willingly, for a
single hour, desert the side of the Comtesse de
Clairville. Yet the reserve of his conduct, the
distant respect of his bearing towards her, pre-
vented all observation of his devotion.

Clairville had welcomed his return with the
friendly warmth of a heart that knew no guile.
The sincerity of his sister’s vocation for the holy
estate she had embraced had long since induced
him to reproach himself for the rigour with which
he had judged the friend of his youth ; and deeply

did he regret the cessation of intercourse that had rendered them strangers to each other. While the Countess, through a natural persuasion that time and so prolonged an absence must have weaned the heart of Léon from its early weakness,—or perhaps misled by the intoxicating allurements of her new mode of life,—feared no evil consequence from their renewed intimacy. As her childhood's companion,—as one to whom her feelings and principles were intimately known, she rejoiced to find him by her side ; and with him, at least, she felt secure from those officious attentions to which her beauty, and her unpractised ignorance of Parisian habits continually exposed her. Whether the feelings of the Count were truly such as interpreted by her ingenuous credulity, may be gathered from the following lines ; which long afterwards were found among his papers, bearing the date of the period in question :—

To E—.

Go ! mingle with yon fickle crowd !

Let hands and hearts be clasped to thine,

Whose love—whose hopes—with smiles avowed—

Contrast but ill with such as mine !

Yea ! let them kneel before thee,—let
Their bolder prayers—their passion move thee ;
And in such worship blest, forget
The heart which was the first to love thee—
That heart whose pride would never bear
So meanly in thy thoughts to share !

Yet, say ! amid the glittering throng,
Is there *one* pure—*one* generous breast—
One fond devoted heart among
Their crew,—whose passion, unconfest,
In spite of grief, in spite of years,
Like some lone shade, his bosom haunting,
Would shun to purchase with thy tears
Joys that might grieve thee, love, in granting ?
No, no—there is not one—*not one*,
Could love, could bear,—as I have done.

Mark well their paltry arts to please,—
The public sigh—the deep-mouthed vow :—
And can pretensions, poor as these
Win e'en a smile from such as thou—
Thou !—in whose sight dark years of care,—
Dark with the fears that hovered round thee—
Dark with the deep, untold despair
Which honoured e'en the chains that bound thee—
Avail as nothing ? Nay !—smile on—
My fears are past—my doubts are gone !

CHAPTER X.

And now, I seek for other joys ;—
To think, would drive my soul to madness ;
In thoughtless throngs, and empty noise,
I conquer half my bosom's sadness.
Yet even in these a thought will steal,
In spite of every vain endeavour ;
And fiends might pity what I feel
To know that thou art lost for ever!

BYRON.

BUT whatever might be the feelings, whatever the artful projects of *Mérangères*, they were alike unsuspected by the Comte and Comtesse de Clairville ; and it was only a passing suggestion of Madame d'Olonne, that recalled for a moment to the mind of Estelle her former suspicions of his character. “ My dearest mother,” said she, with a smile of good-humoured irony at the pertinacity of the old lady's opinions, “ let us hope

that it is not necessary either to judge or be judged on the evidence of early follies or youthful sentiments. The wife of Clairville, the mother of our dear Adolphe, bears no stronger resemblance to the petulant, wayward, romantic girl of the Château de Rocquigny, than the calculating, worldly Comte de Mérangères does to the passionate Rochemore. Believe me, his mind is altogether absorbed in political schemes, and those unhappily of a nature far from flattering to the friendship with which we regard him."

"I might have guessed so," rejoined the Maréchale. "It was natural, it was *inevitable*, that so perverted a mind should readily receive the baleful seeds of the new doctrines. No doubt, your admirer is a member of the Jacobin club, a friend of Desmoulins—of Barère—of Danton—of——"

"Not quite so far advanced in republicanism at present;—his hair does not yet emulate the untrimly fashion of the *Montagnards*; nor do his political associates descend lower in the scale of

faction than the Orléans party—Mirabeau and Lafayette.”

“ As far as you can judge. But even of those ruling spirits of the age speak not so lightly ! My child, these eyes have witnessed many changes ; but they are not yet sufficiently dim with age to be insensible to the awful signs by which we are encompassed. Can you be indifferent to the alarming disposition of the public mind ?—Can you hear, without apprehension, the cry of “ *à bas l’Autrichienne !* ” which attends every public appearance of our afflicted Queen ? Are not insults hourly heaped upon the head of Louis himself, and the privileges of the crown daily abridged ? ”

“ I am assured, my dear mother, that these are voluntary concessions, to temporize with the Assembly.”

“ And would they be required in an hour of security ?—Deceive not yourself, my dearest child ;—you are at this very moment a compulsory absentee from the home of your ancestors ;—

your friends the Polignacs, and several other immediate followers of the court, can scarcely venture to show themselves even in Paris. You will acknowledge the mind of the people to be irritated beyond example, and, alas ! for our credit,—perhaps, too justly irritated by the assumptions of the clergy and the nobility. Are not these grounds for alarm ?

“ May I venture further ? ” continued the venerable mourner, perceiving that the eyes of Estelle were filled with tears ; “ may I unfold the full extent of evil I foresee ? It is my true and firm belief that unless measures of conciliation are adopted, which our wisest and best have declared would be too humiliating to the sovereign,—and still more, that unless his Majesty assumes a firmness of demeanour, and decision of mind, far beyond what he has at present prepared us to expect,—nothing but ruin and desolation can await our most unhappy kingdom ; and woe for those who are destined to witness the struggle ! The court was forced from Versailles

by the violence of the populace :—its present sojourn at the Tuileries is but an honourable duration. The next step of the royal family will probably lead to unqualified imprisonment ;—and Heaven avert that the scaffold be not their final condemnation !”

The Countess listened in speechless horror to this prophetic denunciation ; and implored Madame d’Olonne to look less despondingly on the state of passing events. “ Clairville assures me,” she began——

“ Clairville loves thee with too weak a tenderness to wound thy gentle feelings ; but I, Estelle, have dared to unburthen my heart, in order to give weight to my counsels.” The Maréchale drew nearer to the object of her affection, and taking her hand, bent full upon her the mild but intelligent gaze of her venerable countenance : “ Let me pray of thee,” she whispered, “ to dismiss yonder evil counsellor from thy train ; and to withdraw, during this season of adversity, from the clamour of the giddy world of fashion.

‘When the winds rise,’ said the ancient philosopher, ‘worship the echo.’ May we not interpret this, ‘In the hour of popular tumult, address thyself to solitude?’”

“But would it not carry an impression of alarm if the leading members of society were all to retire at this critical moment?”

“It may be so,—but, trust me, the orgies of the great tend more to exasperate the feelings of the infuriated multitude of Paris, than many graver causes of discontent; and the privacy of home, the cultivation of family affections is surely the fittest prelude to the hour of danger.—Let us prepare ourselves to fall with decency.”

The reflections of the Maréchale weighed so heavily upon the mind of Madame de Clairville, that the Comtesse Amélie, when she seated herself by her side that night in their box at the Théâtre Favart,—all radiant with loveliness and splendour, could not fail to notice the depression of her spirits.

“How is this, dear Countess,” she exclaimed,

smilingly. "Nay—sigh not so deeply; or I shall imagine, with all the rest of Paris, that this man of the woods,—this mysterious Iroquois has bewitched you with some Obeah sorcery. Tell me truly—who is he—and what is the connection between you? It is said, that he has been wandering among the green Savannas for the last century—that he is the condemned Jew,—or the *Masque de fer*, risen from the grave,—or the Comte de St. Germain,—or—"

"He is neither more nor less than the representative of the Rochemore family, and an old friend of mine and Clairville."

"And he has gold enough to sink a navy—and dries his letters with diamond dust?"

"Of his concerns I know nothing,—believe me, Amélie, my present grief springs from other and more general sources. I have been seriously affected by the view taken of the state of public affairs by a much-respected friend."

"Not our Cherokee, I trust;—for they assure me that he stands against us as an enemy;

—that he has deserted the cause both of his ancestry and posterity, and holds with these ruffianly Jacobins!”

“*Paix donc ! chère Amélie !* this is no place for such a topic.”

“You are right,” said the lovely Madame de Boufflers, “it is in truth too serious a subject for public discussion ; and one which, spite of my apparent levity, haunts my sleepless pillow more than I care to own.”

The entrance of Mérangères himself into their box put an end to the conversation,—and Gluck and Piccini,—Jean Jacques and the Contes Moraux—afforded subjects for new discussion. But the Comtesse Amélie scarcely deigned to reply to the observations of Mérangères ; and shortly after his arrival, she left them, in order to fulfil a supper engagement at the Hôtel Stainville.

For the first time, Estelle felt embarrassed on finding herself tête-à-tête with the Count. The opinions she had recently heard expressed

concerning his views, her promise to Madame d'Olonne to abandon his intimacy, all conspired to perplex her feelings. At length, with the lingering interest of one who is about to take a lasting leave of an old and esteemed friend, she turned suddenly towards him, and said with hesitation, "I wish I might presume on our long acquaintance to address a few inquiries to you."

"Are you not assured, Madam, of commanding, at all times, my respectful attention?"

Estelle started as she noticed the grave reserve of his address ;—it had been already pointed out to her by Amélie de Boufflers as an object of mistrust. "Let me venture to ask," she continued, "wherefore you have deserted a party to which prejudice and interest, to say nothing of more honourable feelings, might be supposed to attach you? Our unhappy king—his lovely family—can you be insensible to their affliction? can you be blind to the dangers that menace our common rights, and every better distinction of existence?"

He looked upon her silently, stedfastly, and with a peculiar expression. At length, a slow smile broke over his face. “Are *you* blind?” he replied, as he shook his head with melancholy emphasis. “Are *you* insensible, that you question me thus? For years I have had but one object on this earth;—for long, long years, I have toiled, I have breathed but for one. Many have loved you, lady, but none like me; for I have put on the habit of shame and mockery, and worn it as a bridal garment. To serve you,—to be your defence in the coming hour of danger, I have leagued myself with the outcasts of creation,—I have adopted a creed revolting to my feelings. Yet should I live to save or succour you, these burthens will not have been borne in vain.”

The Countess, indignant at such bold declarations, yet deeply touched by the intense devotion they set forth, exclaimed, “These, Monsieur de Mérangères, are mere idle professions. Did you not formerly imprecate on me, and all who

were dear to me, the bitterest curse that malice could suggest?"

"Thou hast said it, Estelle! And how often have I started from my midnight sleep—how often—in the land where the torrent and the forest were my sole companions—how often have I watched to grieve over that irremediable prophecy! I would render up this right hand, Estelle, that I had never been forced to breathe those withering words of yet unfulfilled denunciation."

Madame de Clairville replied not; for those very words were passing painfully through her mind, to which they had long become unfamiliar. "*Let them live in misery, and die in shame!*" again seemed to resound in her ears. The Count perceived his disadvantage, and interrupting her meditations, once more, in a subdued tone, he began to pour forth expressions of fond and unchanged affection; but Estelle, in assuming the dignity of demeanour which became her character, instantly put an end to the conversation, nor

did she ever afford him a fresh opportunity for its renewal. The following day he found his name erased from her porter's list; and from that time Madame de Clairville entirely desisted from appearing in public.

But in the retirement of her beloved home comfort and peace awaited her no longer. A new and undefinable sense of apprehension was roused within her; the words of the curse were perpetually recurring to her mind; and when Monsieur de Clairville was occasionally detained from her by the press of public business, or during the accidental absence of her child, her fears became unreasonably excited. And daily, and hourly, the darkening aspect of passing events added to the sources of her alarm. The unsuccessful flight of the king and queen, and the insults to which they subjected themselves by their attempted evasion,—the arrest of many of the leading nobles,—the appropriation of their estates to the national treasury, and more than all, the increasing power of the Jacobin party, obscured

the last rays of hope cherished by her sanguine feelings.

And soon suspense was turned to certainty, and calamity and sorrow began their work of havoc amongst those she loved. Her brother,—the gay,—the proud—the chivalrous representative of her ancient family,—perished in a duel arising from a political quarrel; and her father,—bowed to the dust in his old age, by this sudden blighting of the tree of his family honours,—survived his loss but a few weeks. “These are the first victims,” murmured Estelle, as she beheld their heads laid in the grave, “but still deeper,—still dearer must be the sacrifice, ere all is achieved!”

Tormented by this gloomy persuasion, which every succeeding day tended to render less unreasonable, Madame de Clairville drooped at once in body and in mind; and her beauty began to wear the expression of a ghastly intelligence which “o’erinform’d its tenement of clay.” A new, and most unexpected source of consolation was, how-

ever, opened to her by the accession of a bosom comforter even to her own domestic circle. The religious communities of France were dissolved ; and Louise, the companion of her childhood, returned to her family. Many of the professed sisters and brethren of the faith, who were restored to the liberty they had renounced, by the sacrilegious ordinance of the new government, were tempted to brave the resentment of the revolutionary mob, and resume the vows from which they were released. Others marked their adherence to the true cause by flight into those foreign lands which were still devoted to the church of Rome ; but Louise de Clairville, finding she could maintain, in the sad seclusion of her brother's house, an almost conventual retirement, and retain, without exciting observation, the habit of her order, addressed herself to the holy task of soothing the soul of her afflicted sister, and of imparting to her heart that peace which passeth the understanding of worldlings. Madame d'Olonne yielded also shortly afterwards

to the persuasions of her family ; and complied with the especial prayer of Estelle, that hand in hand they should meet the approach of the tempest, whose fury now made itself heard throughout all the quarters of the earth. " Said I not truly," she observed, when she installed herself in the Hôtel de Clairville, " that I should live to repine at the length of days assigned as my portion ? Happy—happy those to whom the decency of a peaceful death-bed hath been already vouchsafed !"

In order to avert the danger of denunciation, to which many innocent revolutionary victims were betrayed by the malice or rapacity of their servants, Monsieur de Clairville contracted his establishment so as to retain only the ancient servitors of his family ; and the little household was devoted to mournful and exclusive solitude. Every day they beheld some friend or kinsman torn from the bosom of his family ; and plunged into the degradation of a common prison, only to be withdrawn for the mockery of trial by an unlawful

tribunal, and the sentence of an ignominious death. Every journal bore witness to some fresh outrage, by which the provinces strove to emulate the barbarous atrocities of the capital; and fathers and husbands lived but to repine that the guillotine had not spared them the knowledge of enormities by which, during their imprisonment, their defenceless families were polluted.

During this awful season, little was known in the Clairville family of the proceedings of Méran-gères, or, as he was now named, the *Citoyen Rochemore*. The silence of the public records assured them that he had taken no active part in the legislative acts; nor had Clairville ever observed him in the processions of the day. But as the chosen associate of *Philippe Egalité*, they knew that he must be among the projectors of every sanguinary measure adopted by the rulers of the people; and his name was pronounced among them only with horror and disgust.

At this juncture, the three helpless females, whose affectionate intercourse enabled them to

support the terrors of their position, were one day alarmed by the prolonged absence of Clairville. Hours passed away,—the season of meals,—the season of repose,—yet he returned not. Already they considered him as lost to them for ever, when a hurried and unsigned billet, in his handwriting, was brought to the agonized Countess; informing her that, having received certain information of his immediate denunciation, he had concealed himself in the house of an unsuspected friend. He requested Estelle to forward him a small sum of money by a sure hand; and to devise some means of following him with her family, as he had reluctantly determined on emigration, and had even obtained a passport for Geneva.

This alarming intelligence was a degree more favourable than the anticipations of his family. “It is to *me*,” said Louise, calmly rising, “that this work is appointed. There is no hand so safe as that of his sister; for thy strength of body, Estelle, is insufficient to the effort. I will therefore seek out Ernest in the dress of a servant; and

if I should find my return dangerous, I will accompany him in his flight."

"But we cannot ourselves remain here," observed the Maréchale. "The officers may perhaps arrive to-morrow to seek their victim, and to affix the national seal on his effects."

"Let us leave Paris to-night then," cried Estelle, wildly pressing her boy to her side.

"But how, my child, without a passport; and who will procure one for us?"

The Countess was silent for a moment.—"Yes," said she at length, "it must indeed be so. Louise, go forth on thine errand. Tell my husband we will rejoin him at Fontainebleau, in the morning; I will myself provide for our safety."

Unable to divine from whom she expected assistance in this necessity, they marked her departure with surprise, but no mistrust; and Louise shortly afterwards left the hôtel, on her equally perilous enterprise.

Alas! will those unhappy sisters be permitted to embrace each other again on this side the grave?

CHAPTER XI.

But they
Who in oppression's darkness caved had dwelt,
They were not eagles nourished with the day ;
What marvel then at times if they mistook their prey ?
BYRON.

THE clock of St. Roch's church struck eleven as Madame de Clairville demanded access to the Citoyen Rochemore of the concierge of his magnificent hôtel. " The Citoyen cannot be disturbed at this unseasonable hour," was the reply to one whose dress bespoke no great claim to the deference of the *Suisse*.

" I would speak with him on business of importance."

" The usual pretext, my good woman ! But send in your name, and you may perhaps succeed in obtaining an audience."

“ Give him this ring,” said the Countess with patient humility, “ it may serve me equally well.”

While the old man was absent on her mission, Madame de Clairville had leisure to observe that the windows of the opposite house, the gay and brilliant hôtel d’Aumont, were illuminated ; and that the sound of music and festivity issued from its lofty walls. She was aware that its noble owners had recently rendered up their lives on the scaffold,—that they were scarcely cold in their dishonoured graves ; and she had heard that their mansion, having become national property, was tenanted by Marat and his licentious crew.—“ And thus,—even thus,” she thought, “ will it be in a few weeks with my own beloved home ; thus will its holiest sanctuaries be polluted, its tranquillity broken by riot and intemperance.” But she had no time for reflection ; a tall figure advanced towards her, through the darkness ; and the well-known voice of Léon greeted her, as, respectfully offering her his arm, he conducted her to the entrance of a suite of splendid apartments on the *rez de chaussée*.

Having placed her in a *fauteuil*, he stood silently, and in evident astonishment waiting her permission to be seated.

"This homage is mockery, Rochemore," said she bitterly, as she threw back the veil from her pale face. "I am come as a suppliant."

"My former protestations of devotion should satisfy you that you have but to declare your will, if, indeed, it be within my power of execution."

"Without wasting further time in explanation," she replied, "you must *instantly* procure a passport for Geneva, by the route of Lyons, for myself, my boy, and the Maréchale, under whatever names you may suggest."

"It shall be done," said he, rising and going towards the ante-room; "wait my return *here*; and in a quarter of an hour your wishes shall be fulfilled. But may I not presume to ask whether the Citoyen Clairville and his sister should not be included?"

Estelle started on perceiving him to be so well

versed in their family arrangements as to be aware of the sojourn of Louise in their household ; and her mistrust once excited, she coldly answered, " Nay, wherefore mar the value of your services by idle inquiries ? I have expressed the full extent of my demands."

He left her without reply ; and no sooner was he gone, and she found herself abandoned to the solitude of the vast saloon, than her mind was struck by the imprudence of the act she had committed. Had she not betrayed herself, and those yet more dear to her, into the hands of their arch-enemy, by a mistaken confidence in his generosity ? Might he not compulsively detain her in the habitation she had so indiscreetly entered ? She flew to the door ;—it was closed from without. She sought the opposite entrance ;—it opened into a spacious dining-room, to which there was no other access. Almost stupified with terror, she threw herself on the sofa to await the result. After an hour, a long hour of misery and suspense, the door was slowly unbolted, and Roche-

more stood before her, holding the passport in his hand.

“I wronged him—I wronged my generous preserver!” said she distractedly, and alternately pressing the paper and the hand that bore it to her heart and lips.

“And how can I further serve you?” he inquired, scarcely able to endure the excess of her gratitude.

“In nothing,” she answered, “save in permitting me to go hence without delay. Alone, as I came, so let me depart.”

“But might not *this* assist your flight?” he continued, his face flushed with the shame of offering pecuniary aid to the woman he loved.

“Oh! no, no!” she replied vehemently; “I am already more than liberally provided. The carriage waits at an appointed spot that is to bear us to a distant land;—and *there*, Rochemore, even there, I will pray for thee with grateful regard.”

She moved to depart,—she was already gone;

—and looking fearfully behind her as she turned the corner of the street he inhabited, she perceived that her commands were obeyed, and that no one followed her flying footsteps. In an hour from that time, she once more descended the stately steps of the Hôtel de Clairville, and silently bore her son in her trembling arms to a travelling-carriage that waited in a neighbouring street. The venerable Maréchale followed as fast as her infirmities would permit; and soon their active postilion conveyed them to the barrier. The passport was exhibited;—*it was in form*; and they passed the gates of Paris,—to them, terrible as the gates of death!

For the first time since her knowledge of their danger, Estelle relieved her overcharged heart by a burst of tears, throwing herself at the same moment into the arms of her beloved parent.—“Clairville will meet us at Fontainebleau, before break of day,” she whispered, “and all will be well.”

“Heaven fulfil thy hopes!” said Madame

d'Olonne despondingly, "and grant us strength to pass through the dark hour of trial, whether it be appointed earlier or later."

Without obstruction they rolled rapidly along; and as the morning advanced, and the little Adolphe woke from the slumbers in which he had been removed at dead of night from his peaceful bed, the Maréchale drew him upon her knee, and said to him gently, but solemnly—"My boy, we are embarked in a serious undertaking. Do you comprehend that we are travelling under feigned names; and that till you reach the frontier of France, you must assist us to preserve our disguise?"

"I do."

"And will you remember, love, that if aught should divide us during this perilous journey,—if the protection of your mother and grandmother, Adolphe, should be snatched from you by death, and you should find yourself an orphan, at the mercy of those ruffians who now alas! rule all,—you must seek neither friend nor aid at Paris;

but strive, with courage and fortitude, to reach the lands of Rocquigny. These gold pieces will aid you, boy ; and should they be rifled from you, rather beg your way towards home than tarry among the destroyers of your kindred ; and Valentine, the wife of Félix the forest-guard, will protect you for your mother's sake."

The boy's heart swelled within him at these sad words, and at the solemn voice in which they were uttered. At last, he whispered to his mother, " Are we not safe now ;—and wherefore should she fear these evils ? "

Estelle kissed him sorrowfully, but replied not ; for some unhappy suggestion, or rather the depression of her companion, had recalled to her mind the tenour of the fatal curse,—"*Let them live in misery, and die in shame !*"

The grey dawn brought with it more cheering expectations ; and as often as the absence of habitations on the road permitted her to show herself without danger, Estelle leant anxiously from the portal, and watched for the appearance of those

who were now probably approaching,—her husband and his sister. So often was her tearful gaze disappointed, that she resolved at length upon a bolder step ; and in changing horses at an obscure village, she demanded of the national officer who inspected her passport, whether two travellers, bearing the same name, had not preceded her on the route. The man took his pipe from his mouth, and answered with *nonchalance*, “A middle-aged gentleman, with a lady, unattended, in a dark *calèche* ?”

“The same.”

“They passed onwards, an hour since.” And this satisfactory information cheered the minds of the travellers ; and they proceeded in happy security.

It chanced, however, that on reaching the following post,—the small town of St. Etienne,—they found the narrow streets thronged with people ; who, even at that early hour, were evidently in a state of violent excitation. Intelligence probably of some popular movement had reached them

from the capital ; for they were parading the public ways with triumph and rejoicing. As the travellers reached the market-place, a terrible sight revealed to them the subject of this unusual exultation.

Two aged and helpless priests, who had been seized by the mob in the private exercise of their devotions, were there bound to a strong post, and pelted by the multitude with missiles of every description. Their maimed and bleeding bodies were bared to the waist ; and one of them, an old and decrepid man, was evidently expiring.

“ Oh ! merciful God ! ” shrieked Estelle, “ will none recue them ? Will none show mercy among those who so much need it themselves ? ”

“ Hear the *Aristocrate* ! ” exclaimed one of the populace who was nearest to the carriage : “ she pleads for her minion.” “ My friends,” cried another, “ we are suffering these wives and mothers of traitors to escape ; they are *émigrées* ;—it were a good work to stop their career.”

The carriage was surrounded in a moment, and

the foulest curses, the foulest invectives, were loudly lavished on the innocent fugitives. Stimulated by their manifest terror and defenceless condition, the ringleaders of the tumult hastened to further violence. They dragged the trembling women and the agonized child from the vehicle; and insisted on taking them to the *Mairie* of the town. The Countess in vain attempted to exhibit her passport; it would avail her nothing against the maniacal fury of an excited mob, now too long inured to scenes of blood. "Fear nothing," said a low voice by her side;—"rescue is at hand."

The voice was the voice of Rochemore; but the person whence it proceeded was only that of their driver. In an instant it flashed through the mind of Estelle that the same postilion had appeared to accompany them through every change of horses on their route; and she was not mistaken. But notwithstanding the courageous efforts of her mysterious protector, Estelle was struck by several stones as they proceeded towards

the Hôtel de Ville; and the mob redoubled in their brutality from mutual encouragement. Even the report that the military were advancing upon the town, failed to repress their violence; the throng pressed more closely around their victims, till their feet scarcely touched the ground.

As Madame de Clairville ascended the first step of the *Mairie*, a shrill piteous shriek of agony from her boy, who was detained behind her, roused her strength to burst from those who held her; and she turned towards the mass of cowardly assassins,—her eyes flashing fire like those of a lioness whose young have been pierced by the hunters! But the light of those eyes was quenched in a moment, when she beheld borne afar off, the corpse of her aged parent,—her reverend grey hairs defiled with blood and dust. A fragment of stone had smitten her upon the temple, and had joined her to the numberless martyrs of the Revolution.

Estelle fell instantly lifeless into the arms of Rochemore; and the last sound that reached her

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ears was that of his voice, exclaiming, "A thousand pistoles—*two*—to him who saves the child!"

The child *was* saved, though mangled with many wounds; and the national guard arriving at the moment, dispersed the discontented rabble. An order in the handwriting of Lafayette, granting his especial safe conduct to the Citoyen Rochemore and his party, secured him the immediate release of the prisoners, and the escort of the troops towards Paris. But to all this the Countess was happily insensible. She knew not that the form she loved had been consigned to a hasty grave! She knew not that she was rapidly returning to the capital with her wounded child; far from their only protector; and abandoned to the power of that man whom she most dreaded upon earth!

CHAPTER XII.

Did Heaven look on,
And would not take their part?
SHAKSPEARE.

DAYS and even weeks passed away before the unfortunate Estelle became sensible of the calamities that had befallen her ;—a delirious fever, arising from the injuries she had received at St. Etienne, absorbed all her faculties. At length returning consciousness roused her to a sense of her wretched condition. She raised her feeble head from a strange pillow, and found herself confined in a dark, stifling recess. “ I am, then, a prisoner,” sighed she ; and she strove to rise and reconnoitre the nature of her abode. She fell back exhausted ; and the feeling of helplessness and desertion overcame her.

“ Oh ! wherefore am I left alone in this lonely

world!" she exclaimed bitterly, as she thought upon those from whom she was torn for ever. "My boy—my boy,—why am I doomed to survive thee!"

A voice—a faint voice—in the darkness beside her, replied, "Mother, I have never left thee,—I am here!"

Welcome—welcome sound! How joyfully did it thrill through the exhausted frame of the suffering mother!—how instantly did her wild shriek of rapture echo to the appeal!

A door close to the side of her bed was immediately opened; and an old woman appeared, and demanded the cause of her agitation. Such a form had seemed to flit through her dreams, and minister to her wants during her fever. "What is your will, Citoyenne?" again inquired the hoarse voice of her attendant.—"First to embrace my boy." The old woman muttered; but turning to the further corner of the alcove, she removed the child from his bed and placed him by his mother's side; and Estelle

mingled tears of agony with her fond caresses, as she pressed his little wasted form to her heart !

After some minutes spent in this exquisite indulgence, she observed that the woman still waited ; and she then inquired *where* and *wherefore* she was thus confined ?

“ Time enough—time enough,” answered she leaving the recess ; “ the Citoyen will explain all.”

Estelle was contented to be alone with her restored treasure, to acquaint herself with the nature of his sufferings, and to glory in his recovery with an intensity of delight known only to the heart of a mother. The door, however, was again opened, and a man seated himself unceremoniously by her bedside. As far as the imperfect light enabled her to judge, he was a stranger, and of respectable appearance.

“ It is our physician,” whispered Adolphe ; and his earnest congratulations on the favourable change in her health, confirmed this information.

“ Now that your kind counsels are ended,” said

Estelle, when he rose to depart, "may I venture to inquire by what accident I have been favoured with your valuable assistance; and why I am thus detained from my friends?"

"I fear, madam, you are scarcely sufficiently re-established to take part in such distressing details."

"Believe me, suspense is far more injurious."

"Let me assure you, then, that you are in safety, although closely concealed; indeed, your recent denunciation renders this precaution inevitable. You were recommended to my especial attention about a fortnight ago by the Citoyen Rochemore, when he installed you in this retreat."

"Am I in Paris?"

The physician smiled; for being ignorant of the state of insensibility in which she had been removed, he conceived her mind to be still wandering. But, in a calm tone, she reiterated her inquiry.

"You are inhabiting a small house in the Faubourg St. Antoine; and this recess is formed be-

tween two chambers, apparently, in the thickness of the wall, and opens through an unsuspected pannel. During the troubles of the last two years, many such retreats have been prepared in obscure mansions."

"And the Citoyen Rochemore?"

"I grieve to say that he is now undergoing a public inquiry into his conduct before the commissioners of the public safety; for his exertions in your favour at St. Etienne have exposed him to disadvantageous suspicions."

"And my husband?" inquired Estelle, with some hesitation.

"I am even ignorant of his name and yours. I can only inform you that the Citoyen Rochemore is reported to have fired upon an officer in your defence; and that he has been imprisoned in consequence."

"Alas! how fatal a destiny seems prepared for all in whom I am interested! Rochemore will perish, and who will protect my boy when I am gone?"

“Your dangers are now ended.”

“Am I not denounced as an emigrant?”

“True; but as long as you remain here, you may defy detection. Farewell, madam; you must permit me to visit you daily.”

Notwithstanding the assurances of her kind attendant, Madame de Clairville was alarmed in the course of a few days by the forcible entry of the municipal officers into the adjoining chamber, authorized by a general warrant to search for concealed persons. She was able to distinguish every syllable uttered by these brutal intruders, who minutely examined every part of the house. She heard them establish themselves at a table close to the pannel which afforded access to her retreat, where they were plentifully supplied with *eau de vie* by old Monica; and during the dreadful hour of suspense that their orgies lasted, she held her son closely within her arms, scarcely venturing to breathe. After swearing to return and drag their hostess to prison, should they find their suspicions renewed, they departed from the house;

and as they closed the door, Estelle fell upon her knees, and blessed the providence of Rochemore who had secured the safety of her child, and the mercy of Heaven which had sanctified his efforts in her cause.

Her health, which was now in some measure restored, soon suffered another severe shock ; for she had at length prevailed upon her physician to make inquiries respecting the fate of Clairville and his sister ; and, after much hesitation, he reluctantly acquainted her that they had fallen victims to the revolutionary tribunal of Lyons ; where they had been denounced and arrested as emigrants !

Thus afflicted—thus bereft—the suffering Estelle, poor, heart-broken, and deserted, would willingly have rendered up her life to those by whom it was required, had not the endearing tenderness of her child hourly reminded her of his claims to her protection. Her days were wept away upon her squalid couch ;—her nights she was permitted to pass in pacing up and down

the adjoining chamber ; which, mean and contracted as it was, afforded her a change of air. Her medical adviser, finding her convalescent, had latterly desisted from his visits ; so that her only information respecting the fate of Rochemore was derived from Monica, who asserted that he was still in prison.

Fondly clinging to the hope that the intelligence of her husband's death had been premature, Madame De Clairville, on finding that her strength was equal to exercise, resolved to brave all hazards, and make personal inquiries concerning him. She therefore dressed herself in some ragged garments provided by Monica ;—whose assistance was easily secured by a gift of one of those gold pieces so providentially bestowed upon Adolphe by his grandmother ;—and one morning, at day break, she crept from her obscure dwelling, and slowly bent her steps towards the *Faubourg St. Germain*. She had previously determined on addressing herself to a merchant who had been materially obliged by her family, and who resided on the *Quai Voltaire*.

She reached his door ; and addressing herself to a shabby shopboy who was lounging on the steps, she requested admission to the Citoyen Bramet. The boy laughed in her face ; the Citoyen and her son, he informed her, had been guillotined several months before ; and his premises were occupied by strangers. Madame de Clairville turned away in tears. It occurred to her that this worthy man had perhaps fallen a sacrifice to his connection with her family,—and it was even so.

She now turned towards the street of her former residence ; and remembering, as she tottered along, to have formerly observed in the *cave* beneath one of the adjacent hôtels, a woman who seemed to gain a scanty livelihood by vending herbs and cresses, she resolved to seek her lowly abode. “ Surely the storm must have passed unfelt over the head of the poor, unoffending Louison,” thought Estelle : and the fact did not disappoint her expectations ; for as she rested against the board that protected the perpendicu-

lar entrance to the cellar, she perceived it was still covered with fresh *bouquets* and *cressons*.

She attracted the attention of the *bourgeoise* by becoming a liberal purchaser ; and Louison—*commère par excellence du quartier*—was delighted to satisfy the inquiries of the stranger respecting the tenants of the adjoining hôtels. “ And who inhabits yonder mansion with the *porte cochère*,” asked Estelle at last ; pointing to that which had been formerly her own : “ who owns it now ? ” “ Aye, that also was the property of a *ci-devant*,” answered Louison. “ He was arrested as an emigrant, and suffered at Lyons. His wife and family fled with him, and I take it they are still in prison somewhere or other. The more the shame and pity,” she continued in a lower tone, “ for they were kind and humane, and easy masters to live under ; and their place is now filled by a worthless quean,—a dancer I believe,—who is protected by Marat. Truly did we grieve when my husband read me an account of the death of the Citoyen Clairville and his sister the nun that

was, from an old newspaper left here by some customer. But you seem faint, Citoyenne,—will you take a *goutte* ?” Estelle, instead of replying, fell senseless on the pavement ; and the compassionate *bourgeoise*, assisting her with a strong arm, bore her down to her own miserable habitation. “ I have walked so far this morning,” said Madame de Clairville as she slowly revived, and found herself encircled by Louison’s ragged tribe of children, “ that I should be glad to procure a *fiacre* for my return home.” One of the boys was immediately dispatched on her errand ; and having liberally rewarded him, and expressed her gratitude to his mother, she directed the driver to stop at the entrance of the *Faubourg St. Antoine*, for she did not dare specify the exact place of her abode.

As she drove slowly along, she found her progress impeded by a noisy and increasing mob ; and the driver was finally obliged to draw up, and make way for a procession, which was cheered on by shouts of exultation from the populace.—

And what a procession! Preceded and surrounded by files of the national guard, there came a common cart, in which were herded together, like beasts conveyed to butchery, five wretched prisoners on their road to the *guillotine*!

Two of them were priests; a third, by her bold demeanour and gaudy attire, seemed chosen from among the outcasts of the people: the other two—and they were those to whom the coarse insults of the rabble were principally addressed,—were the chosen friends, the beloved associates of Estelle herself,—even Amélie de Boufflers and her mother-in-law! The young Countess was habited in plain white garments, with her long fair hair scattered over her shoulders. The blessed hopes of immortality were beaming upon her uplifted face as she stood firm and erect in the fatal vehicle; her arm supported her fainting mother, and her voice—that enchanting voice of gentleness—tenderly exhorted her to composure. She had cast this world behind her; and looked forward to the approaching moment

of release with the joyous trust of an expiring saint.

Estelle pressed her hands before her eyes to shut out this heart-rending sight. The cart passed on ; its rumbling wheels were heard in the distance, and the shouts of the murderers died away. Those hapless victims were seen no more among the living.

CHAPTER XIII.

In crowded halls my spirit is with her !
And happiness is gone, and peace is lost,
And fled the flush of youth ; and I am pale
As the pale ocean on a sunless morn.
I pine away for her——yet pity her
That she should scorn a love so true as mine.
SOUTHEY.

THE mind of Madame de Clairville was so completely overwhelmed by the dreadful spectacle it had been her misfortune to witness, that, on reaching home, and beholding her now fatherless child, she burst into an agony of tears ; and remained for some time unconscious of the presence of a third person.

It was Léon de Rochemore who stood gravely regarding her ; and when at length she observed his appearance, she threw herself wildly on her knees before him, and began to pour forth con-

gratulations on his safety, and expressions of gratitude, mingled with details of the mighty loss with which she had been afflicted. "I am now utterly unfriended," she exclaimed in bitter anguish, "and this boy will soon be an orphan and an outcast." "Not so," replied Rochemore mildly, "not so, while life is spared to *me*. Come hither, Adolphe," he continued, placing Madame de Clairville on a seat; and taking the hand of the child, he led him towards her. "Implore your mother to grant me the right of replacing the protector you have lost. Tell her that no exertion, no watchfulness shall be wanting on my part to render me worthy of the charge. Tell her, Adolphe,—and Heaven witness for me in what sincerity I speak,—that I will urge her to no kinder feeling in my behalf than"——

"Spare me!" shrieked Estelle, shrinking, and interposing her outspread hands as a barrier between them;—for a strange and terrible apprehension rushed at that moment into her heart, and sickened it even unto loathing. "It is not fitting—it is not

decent, Monsieur de Rochemore, that I, a new-made widow, should be exposed to such protestations. You have been my friend,—and I am grateful; but this trial must be spared me;” and again weeping bitterly, she attempted to retire into the inner chamber.

He followed, and most respectfully, yet earnestly, detained her. “This is no time, Estelle,” said he gravely, “for mistimed delicacy or worldly punctilio; death hath been too busy among us to permit of our indulgence in common feelings: else should I not require your commands to respect your solitude,—your irritated feelings,—your deep affliction. But circumstances, or rather your own most urgent peril, compels me to speak. You are now bereft of every natural protector;—nay! shrink not from me that I dare to rend open those wounds which I would gladly die to heal! You are without friends, Estelle!—without succour. This very hour you may fall into the hands of those to whom murder and crime are joyous pastimes:—this very hour your

child may be torn from your bosom, or thrown with you into the corruption of a prison. Say!—what are then your intentions,—what your plans? To whom look you for aid in this destitution,—to whom, Estelle, for friendly counsel and consolation?”

“To my God only for support,—for peace, to the grave!”

“But you are a mother!”

She bent her tearful face over the head of her boy, and meekly kissed his forehead. “I have not forgotten it—I have forgotten *nothing*,” she added significantly: then wringing her hands in the impetuosity of sudden and uncontrollable emotion, she exclaimed, “Would—would that I *could* indeed forget! But the horrible events of my latter days are written in my heart with characters of fire; and they burn, and will consume this withered bosom!”

He listened in mournful attention till her paroxysm had exhausted itself; and was about to urge once more his anxious prayers to Madame

de Clairville, when, withdrawing her robe from his detaining grasp, she said with composure and dignity, "Desist, I pray you, for this one day. To-morrow I will be prepared to listen with patience :—till then, farewell!"

He departed, satisfied with this assurance ; but ere the earliest dawn of that morrow, Estelle and her child, disguised as ragged mendicants, had passed the dreaded gates of Paris, and were slowly journeying towards Rocquigny. Alarmed by new and cruel suspicions of the views entertained by her only remaining protector, she had quitted her abode by stealth before Monica's hour of rising ; and feeble were her steps, and bitter were her tears, as she wandered forth hand in hand with her boy, to seek that distant spot where perhaps no charitable door might open to receive the denounced emigrant !

The whole of the day they journeyed with painful perseverance ; their scanty purse only permitting them to seek the coarsest refreshment, in the humblest houses of entertainment. On the bench

of a common *estaminet* sat the patient and humiliated Comtesse de Clairville, the head of her exhausted child pillowed on her bosom ; and as he sighed with the heaviness of fatigue, she pressed him yet closer to her heart, and prayed the Almighty, in his own good time, to release them from further suffering !

Towards evening they approached the city of V—— ; at the gates of which, being strongly fortified, the travellers were subjected to stricter forms and closer scrutiny than they had hitherto encountered. The Countess was insolently questioned by a half-disciplined national soldier ; and upon the appearance of some inconsistency in the story she had prepared, he seized her roughly by the arm, and brutally insulting her with the coarsest epithets and invectives, he insisted on carrying her before his superior officer.

“ Have mercy—have mercy ! ” she exclaimed, in unguarded terror, offering him a considerable bribe. “ See !—my bleeding feet—those of my child—confirm the fact of my journey and of my poverty.”

“ You are somewhat prodigal of your gold, my dainty dame,” he replied, “ considering your ragged garments ; but we will soon see whether they conceal not something above the condition of a *Jeanneton* ;” and taking her by the shoulders, he forcibly thrust her into a chamber where a party of ill-looking men were carousing.

“ I have brought you a travelling princess, *mon Colonel*,” said the *factionnaire*, addressing one who appeared to preside. “ Will you interrogate her yourself, or shall I convey her to the Hôtel de Ville ?”

In spite of sickness and sorrow,—in spite of a pallid countenance and wasted person,—the loveliness and grace of Estelle de Clairville were still only too dangerously conspicuous ; and she was now reminded of those forgotten charms by many voices, and in terms which, to so pure a mind, appeared a cruel outrage. Her indignation only provoked rejoinders still more wounding to her feelings ; then, falling upon her knees before them, she lifted up her hands and prayed silently,

but fervently. This action, which at the first moment appeared to startle her half-intoxicated persecutors, was followed by a general burst of laughter from the whole crew, and by a renewal of their licentious addresses and brutal taunts.

But their mirth endured not. The door was thrown open, and a stately figure in the uniform of a superior officer of the National Guard entered the room. They rose hastily and in evident consternation as he walked to the head of the table; and turning towards the still kneeling Estelle, he raised her with reverence from the ground, while he sternly demanded her release and that of her son. The commanding officer officiously expressed his anxiety to comply with any request of so trusty a servant of the nation as the Citoyen Rochemore; and Léon bowing haughtily in acknowledgment, without further notice of the astonished company, led Madame de Clairville through the guard-room, and placed her with Adolphe in a travelling-carriage that waited at the gate. With eager haste he seated

himself beside her ; and they proceeded through the city of V——, on the very road she had intended to traverse.

As soon as Estelle had recovered the power of speech, she attempted with grateful energy to address her companion, who was busily employed in restoring the strength of her way-worn boy by food and cordials. But Léon would listen to nothing ; and even through the darkness she could perceive that his tears were falling fast upon the head of her son.

“ Why—why should *you* weep ?” she exclaimed.
“ What have you to suffer—what to deplore ?”

“ Oh ! Estelle—Estelle !” he rejoined in deep agitation, “ think you that I can be insensible to the humiliation of beholding you thus disfigured, thus abandoned to the most cruel trials a woman’s feelings can be doomed to undergo ? You know not,—you will never know, how tenderly you have been beloved by one to whom your slightest wish is dearer than Heaven’s grace ! Oh ! why did you not listen to me !—why did you not spare

me the agony of seeing you thus outraged and insulted ! You escaped from me, Estelle, in the darkness of the night as from an enemy ;—*me*, from whom alone of all this world you can now claim respect and protection. You are flying—I know it, I see it—towards the lands of Rocquigny ; but you are ignorant that long ago they became forfeited to the nation ;—another lawful possessor now holds them.”

Madame de Clairville started.

“ Yes !—they have been sold, Estelle, as national property ; and it was *I* who became the purchaser, in order to insure myself the gratification of restoring them hereafter to your son. It is therefore *my* house to which, unconsciously, you were flying for shelter,—and oh ! in mercy seek it *there* still, and *there only*. That house is yours by every right : rule it as you list ;—only permit me the dear, the dangerous happiness, of sometimes listening to that voice,—of sometimes gazing upon that beloved face !”

He ventured to take her hand ;—it was cold as the grave, and as the grave she was silent.—“ You deny me not ? Oh ! Estelle, bear with me, then, yet awhile : hear my prayer with the patience of compassion. These are not times, as too well thou knowest, for a woman to dwell in unprotected isolation ; these are not times for the orphan to keep his inheritance, unassisted by powerful protection. If thou wouldst thyself escape the horrible dangers of this lawless season,—if thou wouldst save this innocent from new afflictions,—grant me a legal right to defy the whole earth in thy cause. Thou wilt ever behold me, as now, submissive, respectful, and devoted to thy will ; but since there is no safety for thee save under my guardianship, give not to the vulgar occasion to misrepresent the ties that connect us.”

Madame de Clairville groaned deeply, but replied not in words to his intreaties.

“ If I might dare to boast,” continued Léon de

Rochemore, in a yet more fervent tone, "I could tell thee, dearest Estelle, of long years of sorrow borne for *thee*; of wasted time,—of wasted hopes,—of duties, of principles, that I have abandoned for thy sake! I perilled my life to save those who were dear to thee;—in spite of thy scorn, I bore imprisonment and opprobrium with joy in thy cause. My fair fame among those in whose doctrines I was nurtured,—my earthly honour,—nay,—perchance my eternal weal—hath been forfeited for love of thee alone! Shudder not—shrink not—nor say that such unqualified devotion is destined to avail me nothing! Rather promise that I may be permitted to save thee in spite of thyself."

"Deny not what he seeks of thee, mother, whatever it be," whispered Adolphe, gently caressing the weeping Madame de Clairville; "remember, he is our only remaining friend!"

She gazed mournfully upon the child as the moonlight shone through the carriage-window on his fair forehead. The earnestness of despair was

in her look ; and, after some moments, she laid her cold hand heavily on that of Rochemore, and said, with calm decision, “ It is ordained by a mightier will than mine, Rochemore, that I should become thy wife ; so therefore let it be.”

Léon was too wise to allow one word of exultation or joy to escape his lips ; he only pressed the hand of the cold and almost passive figure by his side, as he earnestly implored her to go through the civil forms of their union at Rennes, on the following morning.

“ As thou wilt,” she replied ; “ *time* is now of little account. Let me only pray of thee not to deceive thyself ; but to believe that my heart cannot enter into these inevitable ties. It hovers over a low and dishonoured grave, Rochemore, which it yearns to share.”

She burst into a flood of bitter tears ; yet, spite of her tears—her despair, the artful arguments of her companion ceased not till the dawn of morning ; when Madame de Clairville was reluctantly prevailed upon to go through the civil

ceremony,—the only marriage rites then sanctioned by government,—at the Hôtel de Ville of Rennes. Nor could a statue of marble have fulfilled the accustomed forms with more apparent insensibility to all around her.

CHAPTER XIV.

Wedded to both—and yet, a wife to neither.

OTWAY.

THE condition enforced by Estelle, that these secret nuptials should remain concealed for a time, rendered her return to the Château de Rocquigny less painful than it would otherwise have been. For although the domestics of the former proprietors had been driven from its walls during the pillage to which it had been exposed the preceding year, their places had been principally supplied by Rochemore from the neighbouring village; and it was Valentine herself who came forward, as *femme de ménage*, to receive the travellers.

Her astonishment,—her joy, knew no bounds on perceiving by whom her new lord was accompanied; and Estelle was no sooner borne into the

great hall, than Valentine cast herself at her feet, and kissed them repeatedly in transports of delight. Madame de Clairville had been reported dead ; and, beloved as she was among the peasants of Rocquigny, her safe return could not be hailed but with the liveliest joy. In her pale countenance and mournful insensibility, they only discovered tokens of natural and becoming sorrow for those whom she had so recently lost,—as well as of the personal sufferings she had undergone ; and they trusted that *Time*—the *comforter*—would render back the beauty and vivacity of her youth.

It is true, Valentine was somewhat mortified that she failed to excite the sympathy and indignation of her mistress, by her florid account of the attack made on the castle by one of those marauding bands that were permitted to ravage the possessions of the *ancienne noblesse*, during the most lawless period of the Revolution. She pointed out the still blackening rafters of the splendid offices, which had been consumed by

these incendiaries to alarm the villagers ; and, as she led the way through the suite of principal chambers, she eloquently lamented the loss of the Venetian mirrors,—their former boast,—which had been wantonly dashed from the windows upon the rocks below by the plunderers, who were unable to remove them for their own purposes. The Buhl furniture,—the Gobelin's tapestry,—the carpets of *La Savonnerie*,—the Dresden porcelain,—the family portraits, which retraced the house of Rocquigny to the age of *Henri II.*,—all had disappeared in the hour of pillage ; and the Château, whose elegance of decoration had been formerly one of the marvels of the province, now presented the dreary spectacle of bare walls and naked *parquets*. Estelle dragged herself slowly along upon the arm of Rochemore ; her feelings absorbed in far different observations and regrets ; when Valentine, importantly selecting a new key from her bunch, unlocked the door of the suite formerly occupied by her young lady.

On passing suddenly from the cold and desolate

chambers they had left, nothing could be more striking than the profuse and well-distributed elegance of this fairy abode. All that modern Parisian refinement could offer, was liberally bestowed around ; and it would have been difficult to detect one error of taste in its new decorations. Yet Estelle gazed around her in evident disgust ; nor did the whispered assurances of Léon, “ It was in the trust thou wouldst one day return to thy home that all this was effected,” procure him one gratifying comment of surprise or satisfaction.

“ If I may be permitted to choose,” said she coldly, “ I shall select the rooms formerly occupied by—by *her* whom I have lost—for my abode.” The following morning all that could be removed of the furniture destined to her use was placed in the apartments of the late Maréchale : but she hastily desired they might be returned to their first destination.

“ They accord not with my taste, far less with my feelings,” she observed haughtily, appropriating to herself, at the same time, such plain and

antique furniture as had been beneath the notice of the plunderers of the castle.

From the moment of her return to the Château de Rocquigny, Estelle neither wished nor attempted to re-pass its gates; and as she might have been subjected to arrest at any time, Rochemore was delighted with her voluntary seclusion. Lost in bitter reflections, she would sit for hours motionless and unobservant; and much of her solitary day was set apart for private and austere devotion. The rest of her time she gave to the education of her boy, who was now of an age to profit by her instructions; and the recreation of her gloomy existence was an evening walk on the battlements or *glacis*, hand in hand with her little pupil. For some time Rochemore attempted not to molest her by more than occasional visits; but perceiving, by the changeless indifference of her demeanour, that this delicacy was unobserved, he sought to augment, by degrees, their length and frequency. Coldly passive,—cruelly submissive, she marked no consciousness of the change. At

length, unable longer to repress his feelings, he scarcely left her side ;—and still, she evinced neither displeasure nor surprise. He began to imagine that the observation of others was a restraint upon Estelle ; and he therefore appointed Valentine and her husband, Félix, whose former service in the Rocquigny family obtained them familiar access to their mistress,—to the charge of the Clairville mansion and estates, of which he had recently become the purchaser ; and he continued to pension off her attendants, and to replace them with others from Paris.

The Countess neither remonstrated, nor seemed relieved by their absence ; nor could the studied solicitude hourly displayed by Rochemore for her comfort and happiness, procure him one kind word,—one kind look in return. She fulfilled with punctilious exactness her appointed duties, but further he prevailed not. Like the victim of the ancient tyrant, he was chained to a lifeless body ;—like the fabled Eastern prince, he beheld his bride turn to a statue of marble on his approach !

If there be a superlative torment of human nature, it is that of dwelling in hourly companionship with one to whom our affections are tenderly devoted, and who repays our attachment with the deference of respectful indifference. Hatred had been comparatively easy to endure; but to feel continually within reach of that return of love he so deeply coveted, to indulge in a still disappointed hope of exciting warmer feelings in his favour, was, in truth, a harder trial than any he had hitherto borne for her sake.

Once, indeed, he was startled by finding his caresses repelled with a momentary expression of abhorrence; and this circumstance gratified the unhappy Léon with the long-desired opportunity of pleading his cause, and of appealing once more against her cruel injustice. But Estelle was only too ready to acknowledge her error, too willing to implore his forgiveness; and he was once more cursed by her unrepining submission.

This passing expression of involuntary disgust, arose from a dreadful suspicion that at times per-

plexed the mind of the afflicted Countess. She fancied that those beloved beings whom she had lost, might have been betrayed by the information of Rochemore into the hands of their destroyers; and that she herself had only been involved in a web of difficulties by his subtle arts, in order to be ostentatiously liberated through his interference. But when she looked upon her rescued boy, and considered all the dangers and sufferings braved by Léon de Rochemore in her service, she was prompt to accuse herself of ingratitude and injustice, and to return to that wifelike allegiance which was bitterness to her heart.

Thus afflicted,—thus bowed unto the dust,—thus chained to the horrors of a revolting connection, Estelle,—or must I call her so?—Madame de Rochemore grew paler and more feeble; and her cheek, that had long forgotten the impulse of a smile, assumed the texture as well as the hue of monumental alabaster. At the time of marriage, Léon had, in a moment of self

donment, remonstrated with her on the danger and impropriety of the black robes she wore. Without a murmur, she replaced them with others of bridal whiteness; and from that period she appeared "*vouée au blanc*." The peasants of the neighbouring villages, therefore, who beheld her in the twilight slowly pacing the lonely glacis, might be pardoned for mistaking her for the disembodied spirit of the former *Châtelaine*, and as her return was as strictly concealed as the danger of her position rendered necessary, such an error probably conduced to her safety.

"Adolphe," said she one evening to her son, as they were pursuing together their solitary walk, "although thou art yet a child, much peril and much sorrow have tended to mature thy mind; and notwithstanding thou mayest not perfectly understand all that I am about to say,—yet, there will come a time, boy,—a time, when thy mother will be at rest,—that thou wilt recur to her words, and cherish them, and comprehend their import."

He pressed her hand, to mark his attention.

“Thou art surprised, Adolphe, to see the constancy of my grief,—of the tears that fail not, although life itself is failing! Yet have we witnessed many sorrows, both public and personal. The throne and the altar of our native country overthrown,—its sovereigns murdered on the scaffold; our family heritage wrested from us, to become the portion of the stranger; and last, and oh! more cruel than all, our dearest and best dragged forth to a death of shame! Yet it is not for this—it is not for *these*, Adolphe, I grieve,—for I could lay’ down my head in their grave and be at rest. It is thou, my child, it is for thy preservation that I have doomed myself to still deeper misery. I had trusted to share the wedded affection of but one on earth;—to dwell in his bosom while life endured, and partake his immortality hereafter. Boy—this happiness is denied me! I am become a polluted wife!—and the husband of my youth will revile me when I seek him in a better land.” She looked wildly

around, and her haggard countenance grew terrible as she spake.

“Adolphe,” she continued,—“this sorrow—this curse—is but the just denunciation of Heaven; for I dared to outrage the vows made in its name by wedding with one who, in my marriage hour, I loved not with the surpassing affection I professed; and the falsehood of my lips was heavily registered against me! Yet the Almighty is my witness how earnestly I strove to efface——”

“Estelle!” said a voice from behind, interrupting her, “these late walks—this agitation, the fruit of a disordered sensibility—are most pernicious to thy feeble frame. Return, dearest, to thy chamber:” and Rochemore, replacing her son, whom he despatched onwards, came forward to support her. “Turn not from me, refuse not to lean upon my arm!” he whispered with affection. “Alas! why must these tears still and ever remind me of the unwelcome ties that unite us? Why—why wilt thou turn with persevering sorrow to the grievous past. Shouldest thou not

rather strive to render that existence endurable, which still lies lengthening before us? Thou hast scarcely numbered half the years appointed for the age of man; and may not the remaining half bring duties and joys and ties of its own, to efface the remembrance of our youth? Oh! Estelle, reject not the means of happiness which Providence has placed at thy disposition; trust me, thou art blest with much that many lack. Thy child is spared to thee,—the inheritance of thy fathers is restored to him,—and thou hast wealth at command.—Nay! scorn not that which gives thee power, at least, to comfort the unfortunate.

“And brighter prospects are opening around us. A milder policy begins to animate our national councils; France may finally attain a state of undisturbed freedom and peace, and all will be well. For *myself*,” he added in a closer whisper, “may I not for *myself* add *one* prayer—*one* word of remonstrance? There *was* a time when Léon needed them not to insure thy gentle interpretation;—there was a time—when, perhaps, he

less merited thy grace—that this hand was not snatched so harshly from his grasp ;—and would that he had died ere that hour of confidence and happiness was blotted from his destiny ! But may I not urge once more the fondness—the constancy of my devotion, as a plea to thy forbearance ? Oh ! Estelle, Estelle—didst thou know how deep the wound inflicted by these averted looks,—didst thou dream the hours of solitary agony insured by thy coldness,—thou wouldst in mercy, if not in justice, address thyself to kinder practices !”

“ We cannot recal the past—we cannot recal the *dead*,” murmured Estelle.

“ Nay, then,” exclaimed Rochemore, despairingly, “ if for nothing I have wrought so earnestly, —if my life hath been utterly spent in vain,—let me no longer endure this torment—this *bitter* torment of thine unwilling possession. I will go hence, and for ever ! *Thou* shalt be free ; and for me, I will but shelter me as heretofore in that savage land which hath been kinder to me than the country of my fathers !”

“Not so,—oh! no, no,” said Estelle wildly, “let not mine ingratitude drive forth my only friend. Bear with me yet awhile, Rochemore: forgive my petulance,—but speak not of leaving us!”

Cheered by these flattering assurances, Léon left her to compose her spirits in solitude, and sallied forth in the twilight to indulge in his own more gratifying prospects.

Half a year had elapsed since Estelle had become his bride. The summer blossoms had come and gone, and the sadness of autumn was again spread over the neighbouring vallies. Of the various political changes that had rapidly succeeded each other in the metropolis during the season of his retirement, all were alike unfelt and unfeared by the Citoyen Rochemore. His personal influence, and the secret sources of wealth which his provident address had devised without exciting suspicion of their extent, secured him from danger during the early period of the Revolution; and as he had since retired to obscurity,

without seeking to thwart the plans of others, or aiming at the acquirement of either political power or political fame, he attracted not the enmity of rivals, or the discontent of the fickle rabble. The estates of Rocquigny and Clairville were known to have been already completely devastated ; and the presence of the supposed Madame de Clairville and her son secured them from being denounced to the spoliators as possessing fresh claims to attention by the peasants of Rocquigny ; who were prepared to mark their adherence to their new lord by any active support he might require.

Thus secure,—thus rich in the possession of all that had ever been precious in his estimation, Léon de Rochemore could not look on the prospects of his future life without exultation ; nor repress an expectation that restored health, and the influence of religion over her mind, would renew in the heart of his wife if not her early predilection in his favour, at least the becoming love due to her lawful husband.

As he walked rapidly along,—his step as elastic

as the feelings of his heart,—he perceived a boy loitering suspiciously about the entrance of the château, notwithstanding the inquiries of the porter whether he wished to enter. At length Rochemore himself advanced to question the child, whose perplexity and equivocation soon excited his anger; and desired him to declare his business on peril of being thrown over the drawbridge. Thus menaced, the boy drew a letter from his bosom addressed to the *ci-devant Comtesse de Clairville, au secret*; and ran crying away. The extraordinary terms of the direction roused the suspicions of Léon, and tearing open the envelope, he had some difficulty in decyphering the following lines:

“ *Du Château de Clairville.*

“ MUCH-HONOURED MADAM,

“ I have something of the utmost consequence to communicate; and I have therefore desired my son to deliver this letter to none but your own hands. And yet I hardly know what I have to

fear, for Félix assures me that my news will be welcome and precious both to you and our good lord ; but I have heard and seen many things lately which lead me to fear otherwise ; and I therefore implore you to send me instant information how we are to proceed : it may save much misery—it may even save *bloodshed* !

“ Last night, Madame, after we had retired to rest, we were disturbed by two poor travellers who claimed hospitality ; and when we had admitted them,—in these ragged and despised vagrants, we discovered—arm yourself, lady, with courage to hear the fact,—summon all your fortitude to bear the shock—we discovered the Count de Clairville and his sister, Mademoiselle Louise, who had so long been reputed dead ! Oh ! how greatly is he changed by his long imprisonment ! and the poor young lady too is so exhausted by the fatigues and afflictions she has undergone, that I fear she will scarcely survive till you receive this. They have escaped from prison somewhere in the south, and have travelled hither on foot, and chiefly by

night, for they are still in peril of their lives ; so I have concealed them in the upper *grenier* of the château, till I receive your commands.

“ In reply to the Count’s anxious inquiries, I have acknowledged, Madame, that I know you to be *living* and *well*, as also the Comte Adolphe ; but I have not presumed to inform him that you inhabit Rocquigny, in consequence of the sad fears I entertain on your account ; and Monsieur le Comte is so occupied with his dying sister, that he has not at present time to examine me closely. But pray, Madame la Comtesse, deign to relieve my difficulties without delay ; and oh ! if the forebodings of my heart should be just, may the good God enlighten and protect you in this dreadful emergency !

“ Your devoted obedient Servant,

“ VALENTINE HURTRELLE.”

Léon de Rochemore was rooted to the spot on which he perused this horrible letter ;—he was stricken into stone ! For although it was too true that he had himself betrayed the Comte de

Clairville in his flight, to the tribunal of Lyons, he had received certain information that his victim had perished in a general assassination of prisoners that had taken place in that devoted city. In pursuance of this persuasion, he had industriously circulated the report of the death of the Comte, in order that it might meet the ear of Estelle from various channels; and having inserted paragraphs to the same effect in many foreign and Parisian journals, they had remained uncontradicted during the confusion and universal bloodshed that prevailed previous to the fall of Robespierre. But he was totally unprepared for this most awful refutation! and he ground his teeth with agony, and tore his hair like a madman in the bitterness of his despair. "I knew that I had played the part of a fiend to make her my wife; but I believed her mine as lawfully as the existing enactments would permit;—I believed her mine by ties so tender, so holy—so——" and he laughed with emotion that resembled insanity, while tears choked his utterance. For at the

same moment, to deepen the horror of his position, he recollected the certainty he had that day acquired, that Estelle was about to become a mother ;—and he remembered his own eager, fond anticipations, that this new tie might renew her attachment to life, and soften her heart towards the father of her child !

He sat him down on the base of the lofty arch, and wept till his heart was relieved. Then, feeling that not a moment must be lost in hesitation, he ordered his horse to be prepared, and slowly took his way towards the chamber of his——of Estelle.

CHAPTER XV.

She died—but not alone ; she held within
A second principle of life, that might
Have dawned a pure and sinless child of sin !
Blossom and bough lie withered with one blight.

BYRON.

ESTELLE looked up from the book she was reading as Rochemore, attired for a journey, stood before her. “Thou hast then deceived me,” she said mournfully; “thou art still resentful, and wilt forsake me at last !” And as she spoke she tendered him her hand with tearful eyes, and a look of greater interest than she had yet betrayed in his favour,—a look almost like *those of old*.

This was an unexpected trial. He had been prepared for a cold adieu ; and her unusual softness went straight to his heart : he turned away, and covered his face with his hands to conceal his agony.

“Nay, pardon me,” she said, in a sad and tremulous voice, “pardon me once again, Rochemore!—be as thou hast ever been, indulgent and much enduring for my sake. Forgive my waywardness, and teach me to deserve thy patience.”

He turned suddenly towards her; and kneeling down solemnly before her, he gently took her two hands within his own, and pressed them fervently, though silently, to his heart—his forehead, his lips!—and as they were clasped to his bosom, she felt scorching tears falling heavily upon them. Still more softened, still more penitent for her supposed offence, she bent towards him, and for the first and last time imprinted a voluntary kiss upon his brow. “This is no common emotion,” whispered Estelle, as he knelt at her feet—“nor dost thou contemplate a common absence.”

“It will be at least a brief one, lady,—or an eternal one,” continued he apart, as he rose and stood in stately sternness by her side. “Thou hast given me cause to wish it brief indeed. Fare thee well, Estelle! fare thee well, dearest—most

beloved ! Pray for me to-night ; and if I return not, pray for me as long as thou canst retain the remembrance of one over whose destiny thy love was the ruling star !—of one who cherished thee, even when most thou wert disdainful and unjust ; and who, in thy gentler hour, thine early season of tenderness, loved thee with the softness, the weakness of a woman ! Yet, why should I speak of this ?” he continued, dashing the lingering tears from his cheek ; “ this is a dark hour, and I am bound on a quest whose perils delay will but aggravate. Seek not to dissuade me, my beloved ; I must instantly hence ;—therefore, farewell !”

She rose and refused not his embrace. But as he held her to his heart, a sudden shudder ran through his frame ; and throwing her forcibly from him, he rushed out of the room,—out of the castle ; and mounting his horse, he rode furiously towards the Château de Clairville.

Well armed, and resolute as despair could make him, he emerged from the forest of Rocquigny, and beheld the halls of Clairville, stand-

ing in the moonlight in calm and lonely grandeur. The recollections of his youth came over his mind like a dream, as he advanced towards them; and fastening his horse to an iron stanchion, he knocked for admittance.

The alarm of Félix as he unbarred the portal would have excited the suspicions of Rochemore even had he been unaware of the Count's concealment in the Château. With a cool but determined air he took his pistols from the holsters, and stuck them in his belt; then turning towards the agitated Félix, he desired him to lead the way to the hiding-place of the Comte de Clairville. The man started, and seemed irresolute, when Rochemore calmly observed, "You may perceive, my good fellow, that I am in no mood for trifling; therefore, presume not to rouse my resentment. But, *remember!* whatever may betide between Clairville and myself,—whether bloodshed or even death,—remain *thou* in the chamber. I must have an honest witness that no unfair advantage prevailed on either side."

Somewhat reassured by this request, Félix took a lamp in his hand, and conducted the impatient Rochemore up several narrow staircases, till they reached a low door. "Surely—surely," he exclaimed, with sudden recollection, "you will not disturb him *now*. He is watching by the body of the nun, his poor sister, who died this morning."

Léon started—but again motioned to him to open the door.

A solemn sight struck them on entering. In the centre of the vast and gloomy *grenier*, extended on a *lit de sangle*, lay the emaciated body of Louise de Clairville—of Rochemore's destined bride. It was surrounded by as many tapers as Valentine had been able to procure; the light of which, while it served to scare the reptiles from their prey, rendered the darkness of the vast chamber beyond awfully visible! The spotless whiteness of the wasted features of the dead,—the holy serenity of her countenance, which was even as that of a saint who hath passed unto her

rest,—the stillness of the lonely spot,—all tended to calm the angry passions of the destroyer, as he gazed earnestly upon the couch of death. Then walking slowly and sternly towards Clairville, who sat near absorbed in the deepest abstraction, he addressed him in a low voice.

The afflicted mourner rose in indignant surprise at the disturbance, and replied, “Rochemore! I have been long aware that ’tis to thee I am indebted for mine and yonder released sufferer’s betrayal and persecution. I shall find a time to thank thee as thou deservest, but the presence of the dead forbids all violence now.”

“No!” exclaimed Léon fiercely, “the dead are fitting witnesses for deeds of death! Or thou—or I, Clairville, must fall this night; for the whole world contains not space for both. Chuse, therefore, between these weapons, and take thy ground.”

“Never!” said Clairville, rejecting the instrument of death, “never will I be guilty of this sacrilegious act.”

“How!” rejoined Rochemore; “not when I glory before thy face in having denounced thee?—in having secured to myself these, the possessions of thine ancestry, while thou art an alien and a beggar?”

Clairville moved his hand in angry gesticulation; but Christian forbearance, and the sight of the sainted form that lay hushed in calm repose by his side, once more prompted him to refuse the pistol.

“Coward!” shouted Léon de Rochemore with redoubled fury. “Canst thou forego so fair an occasion for revenge? will nothing move thee? Nay, then, hear the worst! Thy wife—thy chaste wife—thy vaunted Estelle is *mine*—my mistress!—lives in my arms—lavishes her kisses upon me——”

The Count de Clairville seemed to rise from the spot whereon he stood, so proudly did his heart swell within him for a moment. He rushed forward, and seized the pistol from the hand of his adversary; then exclaiming “Fire!” he levelled it at the heart of Léon.

Rochemore fired his pistol at random ; and as he received the fatal charge in his breast, he sprang into the air, and fell lifeless on the floor.

The Count, breathless with agitation, stooped to contemplate his fallen foe ; and a gloomy feeling of remorse for a moment depressed his mind. Although he had been wantonly compelled to the fatal deed, he grieved while he retraced in the distorted features of his victim, the beloved companion of his early years !

Some incoherent expressions that escaped the trembling Félix, as he composed the scattered limbs of the departed, gave rise however to far different emotions. They recalled the taunts, the horrible revilings of Rochemore to his mind.

“ Answer me, Félix, as thou hopest salvation—is my wife—is the woman of whom he spake, at Rocquigny ? ”

“ She is, Sir.”

“ Enough—my doubts will soon be ended. But oh ! merciful Providence, why did I return—why was I rescued from death, for this more awful trial ! ”

He strode away from the fatal chamber,—for what now availed concealment or security! He left “the dead to bury their dead;” and like an avenging spirit, he stalked in solitary might through the grey morning air, as he turned towards that home wherein all the hopes of his after life were gathered in dreadful obscurity.

The horse left by Rochemore still stood at the wicket; he mounted it, and rode on as fast as its weariness would permit. At length he reached the castle.

His face was unknown to the strange servant whom he roused from his sleep to admit him; but there was something in his awful look and determined mien that allowed of no parley. Unmolested, he ascended the stair—the well-known stair,—and entered various chambers in pursuit of the object of his inquiry. At length he reached the apartment inhabited by the late Maréchale.

Estelle, who had been deeply impressed by the solemnity of Rochemore’s advice, and agitated by

many interesting reflections, had passed the greater part of the night in the refreshing coolness of her balcony. It was the first time she had been left alone in the Château since her sad nuptials; and grievous thoughts and recollections had oppressed her in her solitude. The days, the companions, the errors of her youth had risen before her mind; and the very chamber she inhabited had painfully recalled to her remembrance the words of her early lover—" *Let them live in misery, and die in shame!*"

Towards morning, wearied by long watching and long weeping, she had retired to a sofa; for the dawning twilight dissuaded her from seeking her pillow. She had kissed, and blessed, and prayed by her sleeping child; and with a heart heavy with indefinable apprehensions, she lay down, habited in a long loose wrapper, *to rest*.

The sufferer slept,—but not long. An unusual noise in the chamber roused her; and as she unclosed her eyes, she beheld the pale stern countenance of Clairville bending closely over her face!

She started—she strove to wake, for she believed herself still dreaming ;—in vain ! the dreadful vision departed not. *He was there !* his breath was on her cheek ; and in his eyes an agonized expression of mingled love and horror !

“ Estelle ! ” said a solemn voice—but at that moment the door of her apartment was burst open ; and it was quickly filled by a company of *gendarmes* ; who, having detected traces of the fugitive prisoners, had followed the Count from Clairville to Rocquigny faster than his jaded horse could bear him.

“ We arrest you, in the name of the Directory, *Ernest, ci-devant Comte de Clairville*, as having escaped from prison in the city of Lyons ; ” and, taking some heavy irons from the hands of one of his followers, the officer who held the warrant added insolently, “ and this time at least you shall find it difficult to break bounds.”

These words, and the sound of the fetters which they fastened to the limbs of the Count, brought a maddening conviction to the mind of Estelle.

The whole truth,—the horror of her own position occurred to her at once ! Léon—Clairville—*herself*—in what situation did they relatively stand ? She knew not—she felt not—for her mind was already estranged.

The men were too much occupied with their prisoner to observe her motions. Unregarded, she rose slowly from her couch, and with the hissing gibber and horrible glare of insanity, she passed her fingers through her dishevelled hair as she stood regarding their movements. Then with fixed eyes and a stealthy pace, she crept across the room to the still open window, and in an instant reached the parapet of the balcony !

Too late their eyes were attracted to the spot. They saw her white robe flutter for a moment, and lo ! a heavy fall beneath announced the consummation of her destiny. One of the soldiers looked over the balustrade, and saw a white figure suspended in the dreadful depth below upon a ledge of rock over which blood was slowly oozing. “ It is all over,” said the man ; “ she is dead ! ”

Ernest de Clairville was carried back unresistingly to prison: he bore his trial without defence or comment, and perished in the same calm insensibility!

The only mark of recognition he gave from the moment of his arrest, was by turning away with a shudder of horror when, as his party wound round the rocks on which the Château de Rocquigny is situated, he beheld two peasants climbing upwards towards a white object, on which a village crowd was gazing with terror and lamenting!

That ledge of rock has since been removed by chisel and mallet; for Adolphe de Clairville yet lives, and the expiatory chapel erected on that memorable spot, bears his name united with that of—*Estelle*!

THE END.

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